

原作・監修○成田良悟

原作キャラクターデザイン○ヤスダスズヒト

木崎ちあき

イラスト○

一色 箱

アラカル!

博多豚骨
ラーメンズ

HAKATA TONKOTSU RAMENS



電撃文庫

Durarara!! x Hakata Tonkotsu Ramens

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Novel Updates

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Epub: [Trollo WN/LN EPUB](#)

Prologue
闘闘の時代



Prologue: Ikebukuro Dual

Today as well he tried to play a troublesome farce within the Wild Bunch company in a certain place in Ikebukuro

Taking the call from his superior, Wilson headed straight to the president's office. Knocking on the door and looking inside his superior was relaxed elegantly in the spacious room. There was a plump man wearing a dark blue shirt with a dark brown culotte – his name was John Wayne. Naturally it was not his real name.

The president of this Wild Bunch company, John, was leaning back against the black leather sofa just enjoying a movie on the big screen TV. It was one of his favorites – a famous macaroni western. Right about now a scene where the debt collector man and the villain boss face off and glare at each other was playing. It had the mood of an explosive situation.

It was the climax of the film. Thinking he should not interrupt, Wilson did not greet him and decided to watch over for awhile.

The gun fight ended in a moment. The main character who pulled out his gun from the holster at a speed the eye could not even catch pulled the trigger the same time he took his stance. His opponent was just about to reach towards his hip. A hole opened in the villain's body, and he gave an ugly groan. The conclusion had been decided. It was the main character's win.

Around the point the characters THE END floated up on screen,
"President John."

Wilson called out to his superior.

"You called for me?"

Once he asked for his business, John reached towards the remote and turned off the power for the TV. Then without turning towards him, he said.

"I want a dual."

Him proposing such wild statements out of nowhere was a bad habit for a

western mania such as he, but for Wilson, who had been a long time acquaintance of his, had already grown used to it. Incidentally, last month he proclaimed, ‘I want to ride a horse,’ so they ended up going to a regional horse riding club as a company trip. John had straddled the great grey male horse and shouted “Morning, Silver!” with great enthusiasm and hit the whip against the horse’s behind. They ran around inside the course of the horse riding club, but he was thrown off in the middle of it and hurt his back.

Not caring he literally suffered an experience, the man came up with another strange thing without learning from his past experiences.

“.....A dual, you say?”

Wilson ruminated on his superior’s words and frowned.

“That’s right, a dual.” President John turned around and said while stroking his beard. “I want to shoot people.”

Wilson made an unintelligent sound at the radical request.

“Is there anyone left?” John inquired.

While recalling who was within the prison on the floor underground Wilson answered. “Right now there is the man from the Awakusu group we caught the day before.”

“Ah, the guy requested from the Airan group. Well then, how about we use him and have a dual.” John said, pleased. He appeared to be in a good mood. “We need witnesses too right. Gather all the employees.”

He could not go against his superior’s orders.

“Understood. I will make the preparations right away.”

Bowing his head, Wilson left the room.

There was something called a dual crime.

It was reported of middle schoolers getting caught under a dual crime on television before, but the act of a dual was strictly prohibited by law and one would imposed from two to five years in prison. According to the law Act Relating to Dual enacted in the twenty-second year of the Meiji era it is a crime to make a challenge, accept, carry out, or be present at a dual.

In short, president John looking for a dual, Wilson preparing the dual, and the employees of the company that will witness it would violate the law.

– Although the law had nothing to do with anything in the first place.

We the Wild Bunch Company are an outlaw, rowdy group. Our main job is to kill people. It is a company undertaking murder that was started up by the slightly insane president.

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To grant John's ridiculous request of wanting to remake the western dual, Wilson made preparations as he was told to do.

The man from the Awakusu group who was originally planned to be killed was taken out of the jail and brought to the "multi-purpose room" underground.

Multi-purpose- even if it could be called that, it was a room being utilized for killing or torture. In that one room, covered with soundproofing and sound absorption material on the walls, the subordinates playing the role of witnesses were already on stand-by. The twenty sum men were lined up in a row as though to surround president John. It was predestined for the people in this company to follow John's suggestions like this.

The president John wore a black, ten-gallon hat and a gun belt on his hip. A common revolver in western films was hung in his holster.

"I have brought him," Wilson stated.

"Alright."

Nodding, John pointed a few meters ahead of him.

"Have him stand there."

Once he stationed the unarmed man in the designated spot, Wilson slipped into the crowd of witnesses. He would watch the end of the event from a distance.

There were two requirements for a dual. One was a gun. John faced the man and tossed him a spare gun. The revolver glided across the floor and came to a halt in front of the man.

The other was a signal. There were various signals for a dual like when the hand of a clock reaches twelve o'clock or they turn their backs on each other and take three steps, but John chose music.

He took out his golden pocket watch,

"Once this music box tune ends pick up your gun and shoot me."

and ordered this to the man.

The man from the Awakusu group frowned at John's words.

It can't be helped. It's a farce, Wilson thought. Although he said it was a dual, it was only a dual president John would win under 100% conditions. The opponent was at an overwhelmingly disadvantage.

Just as the music box was about to start playing,

".....We don't have much of the atmosphere."

John whispered, displeased. He appeared troubled over something.

Even though he said that, he did what he could. He gave him a gun, a dual partner, and witnesses. It was exactly like the climax scene in the western film. *What more could he wish for than this?* Wilson was fed up with it in his heart.

And then John glanced over at his surrounding subordinates,

"You and you, and then you over there."

He pointed to the three men and ordered.

"Roll over."

".....Wha?"

The appointed subordinates' voices overlapped. They stared hard at the president's face with mouths wide open. The Awakusu group man also stared blankly uncomprehending.

"I said to drop down and roll."

John repeated raising his voice.

One of the assigned men asked nervously. "U-um, president.....What do you mean.....?"

"A western film has a tumbling weeds. Drop and roll around between me and him."

No matter how absurd the request was they could only follow it. If they displeased this man, then they would just be next to play the role as a dual partner.

The three subordinates did as they were told. They placed both hands on the ground and cut in between the president and the man of the Awakusu group while trying their best at somersaulting.

John nodded, pleased to see that, and opened the lid to the music box. A lighthearted music like that of some background music from an amusement theme park started playing.

Wilson felt like holding his head at the scene in front of him.

– It's an awful farce.

It was an evident match of who would win and lose.

The bottomless light melody of the music box playing in the quite space.

The men rolling right to left in a ball.

Let it end already, Wilson gave a small sigh.

As though his wish was answered the melody of the music box came to a stop. The man from the Awakusu group made his move. He made a dive for the floor in an attempt to pick up the gun.

However in that moment John pulled out the gun and pulled the trigger.

There was one gun shot.

And then he heard a shout. The man in the dual took the bullet, not having the time to take up the revolver, and collapsed.

– It's John's victory.

There were the cheers and applause from his subordinates who witnessed this. John's expression as he placed the gun back in its holster was extremely proud.

"Have you been satisfied?" Wilson asked his superior being showered in

praise from his subordinates.

"Yeah," John nodded and glanced over at his subordinates. "Thank you everyone for your cooperation. It's over. Go back to work now."

Seemingly having been satisfied, president John returned to his private room in high spirits.

Watching his annoying superior's back, Wilson ordered the three men acting as tumbling weeds to clean the room and picked up the fallen man's body.



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博士もん

1章

Chapter 1

Chapter 1: The Wandering Hakatans

“Whooooooooa, this is Tokyo ——— !”

An awestruck man yelled in the middle of the JR Tokyo Station.

His age was just before thirty and his build was tall and muscular like that of an athlete, but his hair was ruffled and unkempt and his clothes were shabby. His whole body had a slack appearance and had an air far from that of the refined city. In those hands of his he was holding a traveling case, making him an apparent outsider.

“Ain’t this somethin’?! There’s lots of people! It’s completely different from Hakata!”

The man – Zenji Banba – frolicked in joy like a child seeing the scenery of Tokyo for the first time in his life.

“.....Hey, Banba.”

Next to him the young, cross-dressing male – Xianming Lin was frowning.

“You’re annoying; shut up for a second.”

“The Tokyo folk sure walk fast! Right?!”

The passerby focus their cold gazed at Banba being so noisy as he looked around the area restlessly.

Lin gradually felt embarrassed. Just as he wanted to do what everyone else was doing, Banba started conversing with him while patting Lin’s shoulder.

“Oooooh, Lin-chan! Look at that there! Look!”

“I told you to shut up!”

When he instantly punched him in his large back Banba gave a pathetic “ouch.”

“Seriously.....You country folk are so embarrassing in public.”

Lin glared at him and sighed.

Xianming Lin was a killer.

He was trained to become a human weapon in a remote place in China since he was little, but right now he lived in Fukuoka and made a living as a freelance killer taking assassination requests.

This man with the Hakata accent – Zenji Banba – was the head of the Detective Banba Office Lin freeloaded from, a fellow professional in the killer business in Fukuoka, as well as a comrade on the grass-lot baseball team he belonged to. He was a man with many faces, but to Lin he was an existence similar to that of a partner if he had to put a label on him.

There was a reason for these two to leave the city Fukuoka they have grown fond of and came all the way to Tokyo. The excuse was what the Hakata Tonkotsu Ramens coach of the Fukuoka grass-lot baseball team they belonged to, Genzo Gouda, said.

‘You fellas want to go to a game?’

The Ramens’ activities were mostly general practices on Saturdays and a game with local teams. And besides those they had the occasional game at a tournament. They hardly had the chance to go see a game elsewhere.

It seemed that a baseball team Genzo knew was in Tokyo and that this weekend they were going to have a practice match. They left in a hurry for the match in Tokyo. Since the Tonkotsu Nine each had their own jobs, they had an up-in-the-air schedule of meeting up and dispersing. It did not appear to matter what they did besides meeting up on time.

‘Since we’re gonna go all the way to Tokyo, it’d be rather nice to go the The League as well.’ Banba had said. Inevitably, Lin decided to join him. The traveling expenditures were all covered by Banba, so he brought nothing but his cell phone, his beloved knife-pistol, and his baseball gear, and they got on board the shinkansen.

And like this the Lin and Banba combo team have entered the area a few days before the practice game. Their positions in their team were Lin as the short stop and Banba as the second baseman. At first they could not work together smoothly and there were a lot of mishaps in teamwork during game, but they

were working excellently together as a vital point in defense.

Today they had the plan to watch a night game at Jinguu baseball stadium. Professional baseball would be educational just by watching. The pitcher's ball would feel farther in person than seeing it on the TV screen, and there was the appeal of even the pass to first base the players would manage like breathing air. The sounds of the ball caught in the mitt or glove would sound different to novices like themselves.

Banba had said he had never seen a game in a baseball stadium other than at Fukuoka Dome. This was his first game at a baseball stadium and his first time visiting Tokyo. It was not like Lin also could not understand Banba's tension of being so elevated. However, he did think he was frolicking over it a bit too much.

The professional baseball game started at 6 o'clock in the evening, and right now it was still just a bit past noon. They had to kill some time until then. Hearing they had an array of well-established baseball shops in Ikebukuro, the two decided they were going to first head for Ikebukuro Station, but –

“.....Where's Ikebukuro?”

They both frowned, looking over the route map in front of the ticket gates.

“JR Yamanote Line, Center Line, Marunouchi Line, Ginza Line.....There's so many lines; I ain't gettin' it.” Banba was also giving up. He was making a fed-up expression.

The two, who realized the Fukuoka subway was far simpler, decided to go with the familiar sounding Yamanote Line.

Afterwards, another test awaited the two having arrived to Ikebukuro safely.

“.....Where's the exit?”

Looking up at the guide, he tilted his head again.

“East exit, Seibu east exit, west exit, south exit.....there's too much exits; I ain't gettin' it.”

The main exits from the Hataka station were the Hakata exit and Chikushi exit. It reminded him that the nearest station in the local area was much more

simple.

After the two stared at the map for ten minutes,

“.....Let’s ask someone.”

In the end, they decided to ask for help from the locals.

Banba looked around the area aimlessly,

“Um, excuse me.”

Among the passerby dashing by in a fast pace-one of them halted.

“Yes?”

The one Banba called out to was a boy. He was wearing a school uniform. He was probably a high schooler. He looked less sophisticated but more seriously mature. He had the air of someone who would give an honest answer if asked for directions.

Facing the boy who stopped for them, Banba pointed to the map. “We want to get here, but how do y’all get outta here?”

The boy was taken aback by Banba’s accent for a moment, but he seemed to have grasped it rather quickly. That the lost tourists were asking for directions.

“Umm.....” The boy peeked over, looking at the map, and answered. “If it’s here, then it’s the east exit.”

“The east exit.....”

He did not know where the east exit was.

To Banba who had a confused expression,

“If you would like, how about I guide you? I also was about to head for the east exit actually.”

The boy smiled sweetly.

Thankful for the proposal, Lin and Banba nodded repeatedly. They decided to let themselves be spoiled over the kind offer.

“It’s this way.”

The boy suggested and began to walk. Lin and them follow after him on quick

feet as to not go astray.

“Are you traveling?”

The boy asked, giving a glance towards the large bag Banba was holding.

“Well, just about. We came from Fukuoka.” Lin answered in his stead and gave their names. “I’m Lin. And this guy is Banba. Nice to meet you.”

“I’m Mikado Ryuugamine.”

“Ryuugamine-kun? Don’t that name sound like an air conditioner?”

The boy gave a bitter smile at what Banba said. “I was told the same thing before too.”

Heading for the east exit, the three accompanied one another and walked on. Even so, there is an abundance of people. Even if they walked normally they could run into someone.

The Ryuugamine boy spoke as he proceeded through the midst of the station as though he had grown use to it. “Is this your first time in Ikebukuro?”

Banba nodded at his question. “Yeah. It’s our first time coming to Tokyo to boot.”

“Do you know? In Ikebukuro Tobu is at the west gate and Seibu is at the east gate.”

“Really? I didn’t know.”

“When I also first came to Ikebukuro I was told that from a friend.”

“What the heck is that? This is a pretty confusing city.”

“Are you also from Tokyo?”

“No.” The boy Ryuugamine shook his head. “I have come to Tokyo to transfer to another school.”

While they were talking they arrived at the exit. Going up the stairs, they exited the station.

“– Ohh”

Banba promptly raised his voice at the scene of the vast Ikebukuro before

their eyes.

"I haven't seen such tall buildings in my life! Is that the infamous Sky Tree?"

"As if the Sky Tree is in Ikebukuro." Lin sighed. "You country folk should shut up."

Since Fukuoka City had an airport in its center the height of the city's buildings were restricted. For someone like Banba who was born and raised in Fukuoka such tall buildings were new to him.

The boy Ryuugamine, after giving a bitter smile towards Banba frolicking about in excitement, pointed down the street.

"Turn there then go down and you'll be there."

"Really?"

"It was unexpectedly close, huh."

"Well then, I'll leave you here."

Banba nodded back towards the boy and lightly bowed his head.

"Yeah. Thank you. Mikado."

"You really helped us."

At the front of the fast food joint past the crossing, Lin and him departed from their guide. They looked back towards the boy's back while waving their hands and began to walk again.

"You were a nice younglin'. Mikado Sakuragamine-kun."

"It's Ryuugamine." Sakuragamine was a shrine in Fukuoka. "Mikado Ryuugamine."

"Ah, was it?"

After walking for a bit there was a wide street. It was not a street for cars, but young people were walking in masses. It felt far more busy than the west street of Tenjin, Fukuoka.

"This is Sunshine 60 Street?"

"It sure is lively here."

As they were walking amidst the crowd of people they heard yelling from a corner of the street. When they looked over there they saw several people of young looking groups glaring at each other. "What is it? A fight?" Lin said and tilted his head curiously.

"Like we're saying! You guys are members of the Dollars, ain't ya?"

"Then you know at least the Black Rider's whereabouts, right? Right?"

"Spit it out already!"

The young kids were saying unknown comments about some Dollars or Black Rider. Though it was more like one side was threatening the other and was inquiring about something. He thought it was just a quarrel with fellow kids, but there were some with even knives. Just out in the open in the city. Lin was stunned.

".....Hey, doesn't this city seem a bit dangerous?"

"They sure are."

Though they may not have the decency to say considering they work as killers in the city Hakata, a place with an abundance of underground work for it to be ridiculed with a population of 3% killers.

Giving the gang-like youngsters with a backwards glance, the two pressed forward.

"Lin-chan, look there! It's a Russia Sushi!"

Banba exclaimed while pointing at the billboard of the sushi shop.

"What an interesting shop. You reckon' they have a Moscow roll or somethin'?"

"No, isn't the chef just Russian and the menu is the same?"

It was a shop they do not see too often in Fukuoka. In front of the shop there was an employee bringing in guests. He was a large black man. When he spotted Lin, he called out to him with broken Japanese.

"Young lady there. Eat sushi? Sushi is good. It good for your beauty too. There's plenty of collagen, vitamin A, and astaxanthin."

– Is he a Russian.....?

No matter how he looked at him he was without a doubt a black man. Perhaps there was a trace of Russian somewhere.

As he was wondering this in his mind,

“Lin-chan! There’s a ramen shop!”

This time Banba pointed to an old ramen shop. There was a sign hung at the shop’s entrance that read Hakata Tonkotsu.

“I’m just a bit hungry, so should we oughta have some Tonkotsu Ramen?”

“Ramen is no good for you. Sushi is better.”

Lin agreed with a “probably” at the black man’s words.

“Besides, why should we have come all the way out to Tokyo to just have Tonkotsu ramen?” They ate more than a lifetime’s worth of it in Fukuoka. Lin shrugged his shoulders. “We came all the way here, so I want to have something you can’t have anywhere but in Tokyo.”

“You can only get Tokyo Tonkotsu Ramen in Tokyo though?”

“You say that but you’re going have it and say ‘Tonkotsu is really the best in Hakata!’ you know?!” He pointed at Banba’s face and stated. “You’re that kind of guy.”

“I don’t know none of that. I won’t know ‘til I have some.”

“No, I know you will.”

“What’s up with that?” Banba turned sullen and rebutted. “I’ll cough up and pay, so shouldn’t I be choosin’?”

“Well it’d be better to have something that’ll help with our looks than ramen. So let’s do sushi.”

“Lin-chan you’re already quite the looker, so you ain’t got no need to look any better. So let’s get some ramen.”

“Don’t say something so tactful and try to put it together to get your way.”

“Ohh, no fighting. Fighting is no good. Have some sushi and make up.”

The black man from the sushi shop broke in between Lin and Banba's skirmish.

In the end, the two did not move a foot on the matter, so they could not decide on what to eat. "We'll come again later," Lin turned towards the black man inviting in guests and stated this before taking off once again.

Deciding for now to finish their errands first, they headed for their designated baseball goods store. As they were following the suggestions on the map,

"- Ah"

Banba suddenly came to a halt.

"Lin-chan, Lin-chan! There's a batting cage!"

Catching sight of the batting center billboard, Banba's spirits rose up further.

"How 'bout we head yonder for a bit?"

Aren't there batting cages in Fukuoka too? Without lending an ear to Lin's exasperated voice Banba went inside the facility. Reluctantly, Lin followed in after him. This man would surely become unable to not take a few swings of the bat once he found the batting center.

Banba entered the first booth lined up and put in the coin into the machine right away.

"I'm going to go to the restroom."

Leaving Banba at that spot, Lin headed for the men's restroom. He finished his business, brushed his tangled up hair, and then wiped down the powder of foundation lightly and fixed his makeup.

– It was just five minutes.

It was only five minutes since Lin took his sights off of Banba. – Even so, when Lin came back, the situation completely changed.

".....Banba?"

Banba had stopped batting. He was standing blankly with the bat in one hand. He was acting strange.

"Hey, what's wrong?"

Lin called out to the pale Banba dubiously.

At that, he whispered in a small voice. “.....our luggage was taken.”

“Ah? What did you say?”

He did not hear him.

When he asked again, Banba repeated. “ – Our luggage was taken.”

“Ha?”

“Wallets, the baseball tickets.....ever’thin’ got taken.”

“Haaaaa!?”

What do you mean? Banba began to explain the details to Lin sending him that question with his eyes.

According to his story, their traveling bags seemed to have been snatched off by someone while he was immersed in batting for those few minutes. Even though their wallets, game tickets, and change of clothes were all in the bags.

It was the worst case scenario.

“What the hell were you doing, you idiiiiioooooot!”

Lin yelled and held his head.

They first explained the details to the batting center staff, but unfortunately it seemed today they were in the middle of running maintenance on the security cameras today, so they had no footage of the culprit nor of the event itself.

Next the two decided to seek help from the nearest police box.

The plump police man in the police box was in the middle of a receiving call. When he realized their presence he placed the receiver on his shoulder and called out to his co-worker, “Heey, Kuzuhara-san. Help them out here.”

A police man called Kuzuhara came out from the police box and greeted them. “What’s wrong?”

Banba explained the details at once, “Actually, our luggage was stolen.”

“What type of bag was it?”

“It was about this size; they was black traveling bags and.....inside was various

things like our wallets and tickets.”

“Did you put a hold on your credit cards?”

Police officer Kuzuhara dealt with them kindly. For the two killers such as themselves having ended plenty of targets until now to be in the aid of the police as victims was a predicament they could have never imagined.

When they gave the time of the incident, characteristics of what was stolen, details of the contents, and then their contact information to officer Kuzuhara,

“Now then, please fill these out here,” they were given documents.

Having submitted their report, Lin and Banba left the police box. There was probably a thin chance they would find their belongings. Even if they do, there was no way the contents of their wallets would be safe. It was depressing just imaging it.

It was a helpless situation. Since they did not have any money they could not waste time at family restaurants or fast food joints, and they could not take the train or bus anywhere.

The two aimlessly wandered through Ikebukuro and stopped by a nearby park.

“.....Tokyo sure is scary.”

Banba took a seat on the bench and hung his head.

“I wanna go back to Fukuoka.....”

He sniffled. He was as depressed as when the Hawks had thirteen consecutive loses.

“Hey, you.”

Lin glared once at the man, half-crying, and sighed.

“This isn’t the time to get all home sick now. We’re penniless. What are we going to do now?”

Like this they could not watch the baseball game. They could not eat or stop in at a hotel. Lin frowned, *I absolutely won’t do camping.*

No matter what, we got to get some money.

Banba took in a sudden breath and dropped his gaze down. He noticed there was something fallen at his feet. Banba picked it up. It was a sheet of paper.

"How 'bout we borrow from here?" Banba suggested in a weak voice.

Lin took a peek at the paper. It looked like a flyer for consumer credit. There was the segment, 'Financing on the same day! No need for identification! Fund Refill Sand Riverside Financing' and a cell phone number was also listed along with it.

"Just drop it. It's suspicious just from the name."

Lin rolled the paper up and threw it into the trash can next to them.

After spending the time at the park tediously they still had not solved anything. "Hey, let's go," Lin said to Banba.

".....Whatcha mean? Where to?"

"The culprit may still be in the area, right? How about we look for him in the mean time." He thought it was better to do something than waste time doing nothing.

Banba halfheartedly stood up hearing Lin's suggestion.

They wandered the Ikebukuro area for a little less than an hour. They carefully looked around back alleys and parking lots for any suspicious figures, but they had no results – well, they caught glimpses of suspicious figures like a man in white wearing a gas mask or a tall man with his face wrapped up in bandages, but still having found no one who seemed like their culprit it was a fool's errand.

They probably would not get their belongings back. Banba's spirits dropped to the bottom and had been silent since. It was almost unbelievable he was frolicking about at Tokyo station earlier.

As they were walking and wracking his brain for what they should do, a highway came into view. As they were waiting for the sidewalk light under the overhead they heard a sudden ruckus. *What is it this time?* When Lin squinted there was a black motorcycle that passed at a recklessly high speed in front of them.

“Hold iiit!”

“Stop that biiiiiike!”

Following the rider was a crowd of people. From cars, motorbikes, and bicycles to even people running on foot.

Seeing that the passerby waiting on the light also began to pipe up. “Hey, wasn’t that the Black Rider just now?”

“You mean the Black Rider with that ten million bounty?”

“There’s no question about it! Let’s go after it too!”

He heard such conversations. Two groups of youngsters rush off in a hurry in the direction the rider disappeared to.

– Bounty?

Just now the young people said the word ‘bounty.’

Lin suddenly had a thought. “I see, so there was that option.”

“.....Eh?”

“I got a good idea.”

“What is it now?” Banba peeked at his face. “What is it?”

Taking out his portable phone from his pocket, Lin opened the bookmarked page ‘Undergroundjobs.com/Fukuoka-Version.’ It was an underground site of people working in the underground offering services and applications for illegal jobs and the buying and selling of dangerous goods anonymously.

“Like this we can get money here (Ikebukuro).”

“Eh? Whatcha mean by that there?”

“We’re going to look for bounties. Bad guys in this area. If we catch them, we can earn money. In cash.”

In the past one of their friends had a bounty put on his head on this underground site, and they had an incident of bounty hunters chasing him down. Perhaps there was the chance there was a bounty put out for someone the same way in Ikebukuro. If they caught the person in question, then even

they could earn money right now.

In other words, it was Lin's idea to play at being bounty hunters.

Having arrived to the Fukuoka version of Undergroundjobs.com he then opened the site for the Tokyo version of Undergroundjobs.com. He proceeded to the search form and started looking for posts with hits under any of the keywords for 'recompense,' 'bounty,' and 'reward.'

The search results were more than one hundred. The newest post was "The Black Rider – Reward 10,000,000." *I see, that's what they were talking about earlier, Lin nodded in understanding. Right now the people in Ikebukuro are pursuing that bounty. The amount of competitors is high, so we'll pass this. Besides what we want isn't a lot of cash. We just need enough to live comfortably during these next few days in Tokyo.*

The next one was, "Looking for information on the Headless Rider – Reward 20,000." *20,000 is too little, and we don't know anything about the Headless Rider. That's also a pass.*

The next entry was "Recruiting people willing to die together – Reward 50,000." It was from someone wishing to commit suicide. *How would you get the reward? They'd be dead. What an idiot.* Lin while cursing in his mind scrolled through the screen.

When he streamed back through past posts,

" – This seems good."

He finally found a valuable one on the eighth entry. The submission date was two days ago. It was accompanied with the man's name and photo of his face. It was a young man named Shinta Kasaoka.

'For those who catch this man we will pay a bounty of three hundred thousand yen. The people to hand him over to is at the NPB.'

– So was the paragraph listed with a cell phone number provided as means for contact.

".....What's NPB?"

"Ain't that the Nippon Professional Baseball Organization?" Banba answered.

"I'm sure it's not that."

Lin slumped his shoulders.

They would not make any progress no matter how much the two discuss over it between themselves. *I guess I should ask that guy who knows everything then.* Lin called an informant he knows right away, assuming he is cooped up in some internet cafe somewhere in Fukuoka right now.

It was only a few days prior when he received a message from a household servant employed by his father.

– It seems Miyoko-sensei is to be married.

Just from receiving that e-mail Enokida's heart stirred so unlike himself.

When, where, and whom was the woman Miyoko going to marry? The e-mail did not say much. However, for Enokida, who was recognized as a genius hacker by others and being an informant basing his operations in Fukuoka, that one sentence was all he needed. With his specialty hacking skills he could look up the day and time of the wedding ceremony, the place of the ceremony, the address and the place of the after party as well.

The location was a ceremonial site in Ikebukuro and it seemed to be a church wedding that was popular right now. Imagining the form of the woman declaring her love with her partner in front of the minister Enokida gave a faint smile.

Miyoko was his past piano teacher. Enokida was taught by her when he was still a middle schooler. She was the daughter of a fairly famous musician in the trade, and at the time she was a student attending music college in the city.

Their parents knew each other, and Enokida's father who took a liking to her had hired her on a whim as his son's instructor as a part time job. He was taught piano by servants before then, but since that day Enokida took lessons from Miyoko. – A few years later he had a gun pointed at him by a servant and was to be erased under orders from his father, but that was another story.

Enokida was born as the eldest son of a politician's family. Amidst the overbearing, harsh schooling environment under his father, the once-a-week piano lessons were what he looked forward to the most for the middle schooler

Enokida. Miyoko was extraordinarily beautiful and was inhumanely kind. Her existence was the one solace he had in his life, and the young Enokida grew emotionally attached to her.

Now thinking about it, maybe that was something like a first love. The news that Miyoko-sensei is getting married caused ripples in Enokida's heart. While he felt a sort of loneliness, on the other hand he also got the feeling of wanting to see her as a bride even just once. Even if he could not give his wishes directly, he wanted to watch her ceremony from the shadows.

According to what he researched, after the ceremony there would be a grand garden party put together with the after party. The bride was the daughter of a famous musician. The guests who would be gathering were well-known people, and the sheer number would certainly be large. And so Enokida mixing in among them alone should not cause anyone to notice him. He could watch her being happy at a distance. If he was allowed one wish, even one thing, it would be to give her his words of congratulations though.

And so Enokida headed to Tokyo immediately.

He also had plans to head to Tokyo anyway, so while repeating the excuse of "it was just an opportunity" in his mind he walked through the city of Ikebukuro. Dressed in formal attire with a black suit, a gingham checkered shirt, and a small black bow tie, the platinum blond, mushroom-haired man fairly stood out on the bustling Sunshine 60 street.

Enokida contacted the staff at the ceremony site prior to and bribed them with a large sum of money and had set up hidden cameras and listening devices in the assembly hall. It was almost the time for the wedding ceremony to begin. Enokida entered an internet cafe near the site and decided to observe the ceremony from inside the secluded booth.

Typing on the keyboard briskly, he worked on his laptop right away. On the screen the footage from the cameras he had set up by his helpers was being displayed.

It was a pure white space of a chapel. Long chairs were lined up along the aisle, and in front hung a large cross. The minister was the first to enter the majestic hall. After finishing his greetings, next the groom in a tuxedo appeared.

After that the bride wearing a white mermaid dress was walking down the aisle, hooked arms with her father. – It was Miyoko. As always, she was beautiful. And now the two of them were going to become husband and wife and stand before the minister.

When the singing of the hymnal finished, it moved abruptly to the written vows. Normally they should receive a message or a biblical quote from the minister though. They skipped quite a bit, while tilting his head at that Enokida watched the screen as though eating into it.

‘In sickness, and in health.’

The minister holding the ceremony was a large, American-looking man. He was wearing black, stand-up collar clothes, but perhaps they were too small but they were not completely buttoned. His burly pectorals were exposed with a golden cross glinting on top of them. It felt as though he was hired as minister.

The minister continued further in broken Japanese.

‘And do you swear to love, respect, and cherish your husband even when he cheats on you, or when you get bored of him and call off talks off marriage?’

At the words of the mad minister, the bride and groom answered in turn, confused.

‘Yes, I swear.’

They gave their vows and exchanged rings. *Is the kiss next?* While he was wondering that he leaned back in his chair when it happened.

A call came in. He picked up his computer and hit the call button. “Hello~?”

[It’s me, Lin.]

A voice of a friend came in. Xianming Lin – he was a client of Enokida’s and a young male friend of his who was on the grass-lot baseball team he belonged to.

“What’s up?”

When he asked him as always,

[I got a guy I want you to look into.] Lin addressed the case concisely. [His

name is Shinta Kasaoka. I e-mailed over the guy's facial photo. I want to know where he is right now.]

Xianming Lin was a killer. He often asked him to look up things in this manner to Enokida. He probably got a request for this man's, this Kasaoka's, assassination.

"O-kay~" Enokida nodded. "I'm a bit busy at the moment, so I'll look it up later and contact you then."

[Alright. If you can as soon as possible.]

Talk to you then, as he was about to drop the call there,

[- Ah, wait a second.]

Lin spoke up.

"What is it?"

[Do you know NPB?]

"NPB?"

It was a sudden question, but he did recall it from numerous times before.

Enokida nodded. "Ahh, yeah. More or less."

[What is it? The NPB.]

"Isn't it the Nippon Professional Bounty Hunters Organization?"

[.....The Nippon Professional Bounty Hunters Organization?]

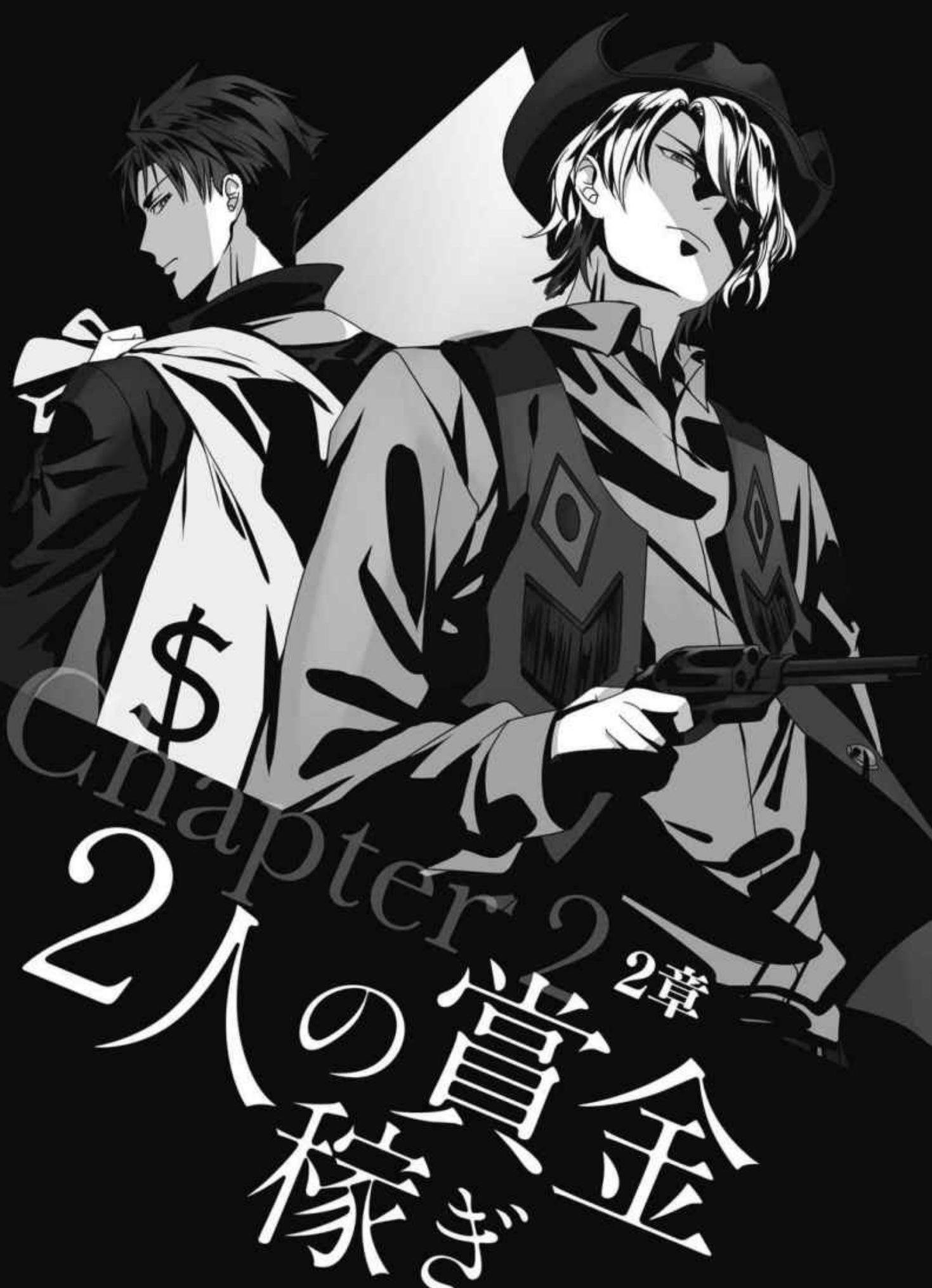
"Simply put, they're guys who gather bounty hunters with the qualities of a professional. They're an organization of a famous American bounty hunting company that came to Japan and started up."

When he explained it simply,

[Huh, you're informed about it.]

As expected of you, Lin whispered on the phone.

Naturally he was informed about it. "Well, I have an acquaintance in the NPB."



\$ Chapter 2

2章
稼ぎの賞金

Chapter 2: The Two Bounty Hunters

The Nippon Professional Bounty hunter Organization – alias NPB – was an organization administered by the American bounty hunting company, Westwood Company. They had offices in twelve places throughout the whole country of Japan, and they offered professional qualifications for their bounty hunters and managed their jobs; being able to capture villains informally was a main job for them.

In the case someone wanted to put up a bounty, if they contact the NPB they would make a wanted poster for them. After that, the NPB side arranged it as a bounty and offered the job to their bounty hunters. That was their structure. The NPB provided a 10 to 20 percent ratio for commissions of the bounty price.

In recent years with the proceedings of globalization crime had surged, and there were many cases the police could not manage. Being tied up, they had used the NPB inevitably. The bounty hunters in the NPB were all skilled people who had passed the organization's strict examinations. As such they had a deep trust from the police.

Wyatt Westwood was the younger brother of the president of the Westwood company. He was an NPB personnel and the owner of the western bar in a certain part of Shinjuku, 'Dodge City.' He was American born, but he had been living in Japan for ten-odd years. He was also proficient in Japanese.

There was a swing door set up at the entrance of Dodge City and further inside was a setting of a Texas bar from the western pioneering age. At the four round tables brawny men were each passing the time doing as they pleased. There were also people arm wrestling, doing drinking contests, or indulging in poker. There were many who looked genuinely aggressive and rough around the edges. However, the guys were all good natured.

Beer caskets line the walls and above are the bounties of scoundrels posted in a row. The BGM inside the facility was of course a western soundtrack.

In the center of the bar there was a counter with no stools. And there Wyatt

in his western style getup, with a vest over his shirt and a ten-gallon hat on his head, was working restlessly. After taking a whiskey from the inside of the bottle lined in front of a large mirror and pouring it into a glass in the clutter, he handed it over to his guest in exchange for coin.

“ – Hey, sheriff.”

At the center table a man playing a drinking game with his friends called out to Wyatt.

“How about having a drink yourself? Won’t you come over here and have one?”

“I would like to about now,” Wyatt gave back a wry smile. “But I still have work. I’ll restrain myself.”

The guest called Wyatt “sheriff.” The shining star on his breast and the jail at the center of the his counter space was the reason why.

Here at Dodge City it was a place for bounty hunters to relax at as well as an office of the NPB. Wyatt’s job at this bar reeked of men was to receive the person with the bounty as the head of the Shinjuku office of the NPB, pay the bounty hunters their reward, and serve alcohol to them as the owner of the bar when they have finished their job.

Wyatt got out from behind the counter. He put up the new wanted poster – “Company Employee Hit Man Shinta Kasaoka – ¥300,000” – that came in from the company onto an open space on the bulletin board wall.

On the right side of it is the “Corrupted Bounty Hunter Masayuki Murai – ¥120,000.”

On the left side was “luggage thief Minoru Morita – ¥30,000.”

– On the large bulletin space most of the bounty posters were overflowing.

Wyatt peeled off the caught bounty from there, rolled it up and threw it into the garbage bin. The professional bounty hunters the NPB had were all skilled. It was thanks to them that many of the scoundrels were tied in rope today as well.

That was right; there was certainly no one but skilled guys here – but there

were two newcomers among them that bother Wyatt.

One was the “Double-Hand Gun Tiger,” Torakichi Nishino.

The other was the “Minister with the Right Hand of the Devil,” Rabito Westwood.

Wyatt remembered the two novice bounty hunters were probably chasing wanted men somewhere in Tokyo right now and felt a headache coming on.

Torakichi Nishino strode down the back alleyway while humming a tune.

The song he was humming to was the theme song of a certain western film. It was a macaroni western about the skilled gunmen half-brothers, the self-proud man with superhuman strength Bambino and the slothful Trinity, and it was a novelty comedy production with a large brawl in the end regardless of it being a western film. To Tora, who loved the dual scenes with gunfights, considered it a heretic film, but he took a liking to this theme song.

After briefly fixing his black-streaked blond hair, Tora straightened his beige hat and hurried ahead. Each time he walked the spurs attached to the heels of his boots would click. On his off-white western shirt he had brown suspenders. He had a gun belt wrapped around his waist and two guns often used in western films, a revolver and the Colt SAA, hung from the holster. – All of this were his part-time work uniform.

When he proceeded further; the building he was targeting came into view. It was a ragged apartment building at a corner in west Shinjuku. It was in a easy to get in area, and the rent was reasonable. It was a suitable place for refuge for shady people.

And one room among them – room 103.

His target was living here.

Tora leaned down in front of the door and while humming the tune picked the lock. The skill he learned during his wild adolescent life was coming in handy right now. Opening the lock to a cheap apartment was no trouble for him at all. He unlocked the door and stepped inside.

“– Wh-who are you!?”

As he stepped foot into the entrance a short man jumped out of the bed.

He stopped humming and asked him,

“You’re Masayuki Murai, right?”

He checked his face. It was the same as the photo on the wanted poster. There was no doubt about it. This guy was the twelve hundred thousand bounty – the “Corrupted Bounty Hunter” Murai.

“Who knew there was a bounty hunter who conspired with the wanted man and deceptively took the reward money out there.” Tora said cynically while keeping his focus on him. “Though the hunter has become the hunted in this case.”

This man was a professional bounty hunter employed under the NPB Nagoya office. However, after catching and handing over the wanted man and taking his reward, he had done the misdeed of helping the wanted man escape a few times and had become a wanted man himself for it.

As such Murai having disappeared from Nagoya had run all the way to Tokyo, but he could not escape from the NPB’s network.

“Damn, a bounty hunter!”

Murai looked at Tora and tutted. He then immediately reached for underneath his pillow. He probably intended to take out a hidden handgun from there.

“– Stop right there.”

When he addresses that with a stern voice the man’s movements came to a halt.

“It won’t even take 0.5 seconds for me to take a gun out from this holster and shoot you through the head. I can quick-draw better than Alan Ladd. You don’t have a chance.”

If he was the type of person to take such a warning he would not be a bounty hunter though. Murai hollered “shut the hell up” as though to rouse himself and took out his handgun from underneath the pillow. However, at that time the match had already been decided.

In just a moment Tora took out his handgun, cocked the gun and pulled the trigger. The bullet he fired hit the other's gun. The gun snapped out of his hand from the impact and dropped to the floor.

"– Didn't I say it?" Facing the unarmed man Tora smiled. "I have confidence in my firing arm."

It was settled.

The man completely lost his fighting spirit and took the pose of surrender, raising both his hands. Tora walked up to him, took out one of his trade hand cuffs and bound the man's arms behind his back.

".....You can't be," The caught man glimpsed at the gun belt wrapped around Tora's waist and made a sudden realization. "Are you the Two-Hand Gun Tiger?"

"Hey, hey, you serious?" Being called by his popular name Tora slipped out a wry smile. "So rumors about me have reached all the way to Nagoya, huh?"

"Your name is written as 'soul of a fierce tiger' and read as Torakichi – with a strange name like that there's no way I would forget that after hearing it once."

The moment he heard those words Tora's smiling face turned harsh cold.

".....What did you say?"

Tora asked once more.

With a intimidating, tone of voice with a trace of malice like a low pitched growl.

"– Who's name is strange now?"

Unknowingly Tora clenched his fists.

Torakichi Nishino – speaking ill of this precious name he was given by his now deceased mother (she was a fan of Hanshin and was the ladies president) was something he could not forgive more than anything.

Since he sent kids of the same grade as him to the hospital for laughing at his name Tora (tiger) when he was an elementary schooler, he would not let anyone off for having a problem with his name.

No matter how much shorter the man was, carrying the unconscious man

required far more effort. *I shouldn't have beat him up to unconsciousness, huh,* Tora while reflecting on that carried Murai to his part time job.

Dodge City – it was a western bar quietly set up in a certain part of Shinjuku. Tora worked daily as an employee and as a bounty hunter here for part-time.

He passed through the swinging doors and stepped in while half dragging Murai inside. There were no guests in and it was completely deserted. Everyone must be out.

“ – Ohh, Tora. Welcome back.”

The owner Wyatt took notice of him and addressed him.

He seemed to have just had a smoke, asking him while blowing out white smoke from his mouth. “Where did you go?”

“I came back from catching this guy.” Tora dropped Murai’s body to the floor and pointed to him with his chin. “Put this guy in the jail.”

“Who is this guy?”

“Look, that one.” This time he pointed to the wall. At a corner on the bulletin board hung the man’s wanted poster. “The corrupted bounty hunter one.”

“Ahh, Murai, huh.”

Wyatt confirmed the bounty’s looks and frowned, “He’s hurt pretty badly.” Murai’s eyes were swelled up, his nose crooked, and his whole face was soiled in blood.

“He struggled, so I gave him a few punches.” Tora lied at once. He could not say that he completely lost it having been told his name was weird and beat him up one-sided.

“Next time avoid the face. Or else we can’t compare him with the wanted poster.”

“I’ll contemplate it.”

Tora nodded honestly while taking his reward money.

“ – Hey, Tora.”

Wyatt suddenly realized.

"Where's your bandana?"

Tora always wore a yellow bandana around his neck, but he did not wear it today.

"Ahh, that." He nodded and answered. "I threw it away."

"That sucks; you looked cool with it." Wyatt frowned in disappoint. "You looked like Steve McQueen of The Magnificent Seven."

"Well yesterday I was mistaken from someone of the Yellow Scarves or whatever and was cornered by an odd group."

Tora recalled the events of yesterday. When he was walking around the city of Ikebukuro on his way back to work he was suddenly cornered by a group of youngsters. 'Are you part of the Yellow Scarves?' One of them who drew close to him with a brazen attitude was apparently someone from a kind of color gang, the Blue Squares.

"I told them, 'I'm not part of the Yellow Scarves. I'm Torakichi Nishino,' but one of the kids made fun of my name – "

"That's enough." Wyatt interrupted Wyatt. "I can imagine the rest."

Just as he sent the one who had an issue with his name flying with a punch the rest of the group having felt their lives in danger scattered off in all directions. They seemed to become apparent that Tora was not part of the Yellow Scarves, but it was not certain that it would not happen again.

"It's bothersome to be picked on for a fight just for wearing a bandana, so I stopped wearing it."

Having explained the details while shrugging his shoulders, Wyatt nodded with "well it can't be helped if that's the case."

Tora did odd jobs in this bar in between bounty hunting. "What should I help you with?" When he asked, Wyatt put the cigarette back into his mouth and shook his head left to right.

"There isn't many guests, so you can go home already."

It was still the afternoon. Even if he went home now he would not do anything in particular. *If so then I guess I should do another bounty then*, Tora

stared at the shop's bulletin board. "Who should I go for next?"

"Tora," Wyatt addressed him. "It's fine to try so hard for your family, but don't push yourself."

Wyatt was a worrywart. Tora slumped his shoulders and answered, "I know." He did not plan to push himself and overdo it. However, his younger brother's examinations were this year. When he could save up money it was better that he did.

Tora turned his gaze back to the board and carefully looked at the catalog of scoundrels. The first to catch his eye was the wanted poster of a mysterious person called the Black Rider. The bounty is ¥10, 000, 000. It was a tremendous amount.

"Ten hundred...." After counting the zeros Tora whispered under his breath. ".....Ten million? Aren't the digits wrong?"

"No, it's right. Some big entertainment company put out the bounty on that guy." Wyatt had answered. "On top of not having a clue who the guy even is, the price is too huge, so no one here would even look at it."

"Naturally so."

Anyone should have suspicions if there was something behind that ten million bounty or not. For bounty hunting there were too many risks. And so moderate prices for a job are more in favor.

"Because of novices having started acting like bounty hunters it's a huge ruckus in Ikebukuro right now. It seems the guy riding the black motorbike is being attacked indiscriminately."

"Seems troublesome."

The photo of the Black Rider on the wanted poster was a full-face helmet. Since there was no face there was no help in finding him. He decided to pass on this one.

He moved his gaze to another wanted poster. This time was the 'Philosophical Murder Machine.' "That's quite the name." Tora murmured.

Wyatt made a comment. "That's a Russian hit-man. It seems he has come to

Japan, but buddies of the guys he killed in the past put that bounty on him.”

How do you find a killer without a face or a name? This is also a pass.
Definitely a pass.

The wanted poster next to that one was the ‘Killer Hollywood.’ The price of the bounty was not that bad, but looking over the details Tora gave a sigh. “Characteristics: Monkey, half-fish man, a dinosaur-like face.....So just what kind of face does he have?”

There's no decent wanted men, huh, as he was looking at the bulletin with an irritated attitude he found a brand new one up there.

“Company Employee Hit Man Shinta Kasaoka – Bounty ¥300,000.”

“That one just came in.” Wyatt said while lighting a new cigarette. “It seems that Kasaoka guy was a former company employee of Murder Inc.”

“Murder Inc. That killer contracting company?” He had heard the rumors before.

“That’s right. This man quit the company half a year ago and moved to another organization, but.” He took out his cigarette and continued. “There’s talk that they were involved in that case with one of the Awakusu Group’s executive trainees’ disappearance.”

“The Awakusu Group?”

If I recall right, weren't they the Medei's group's subordinate organization? He guessed the details.

“So the Awakakusu Group went through the NPB and put a bounty on this man?”

In order to catch this man and have him tell him of the truth of the killing.

“That’s right.” Wyatt nodded.

Three hundred thousand was an appropriate amount. It was not something he could not reach. “I guess I’ll go for him next.” Tora whispered.

“– Wait, Tora.”

However, Wyatt gave his disapproval.

"The opponent is a killer. Don't go after him alone."

"I'll be fine. I have this." Tora pointed to the Colt hanging on his waist.

"I'll acknowledge your skill. But your opponent may have comrades. These guys are nothing like the small fry you've been after up 'till now. If you plan to catch them, they will try to kill you mercilessly. If something were to happen to you, what will happen to the family you have left?"

For a moment the faces of his younger brothers came to his mind. "I won't do anything to make them sad."

"Making an opponent with a killer alone is an act of suicide. You should pair up with someone."

Just as Wyatt said there were plenty of times bounty hunters form combos and teams. It was because this industry was a job to catch the wanted men and hand them over to the organization. And they had to detain the outlaw until then. Taking in the labor into consideration for that, having more would be efficient and with less risks than alone.

But Tora did not feel up to pairing with someone.

"If I did that, then the portion of the pay will be cut in half." Tora slumped his shoulders. "Besides, who do you suggest I should pair up with at a time like this?"

"How about him?"

"Him?"

"My nephew -"

"Don't kid around." Tora cut off Wyatt's words.

Just recalling that man's face made him irritated.

"I'd rather die than team up with that gorilla guy."

And just around this time, the gorilla guy Rabito Westwood was having a cold sweat in front of the bride and groom. The hymnal 312 ended, and it was about time for the middle of the wedding ceremony.

"In sickness, and in health."

Having cited that, for a moment the movement of his lips stopped.

– Huh? What was the next line?

The next lines completely escaped him. He could not remember.

–Well, whatever.

It was not like the people here were modest Christians. There were just western influenced Japanese people who were having a church wedding, so who cared for the Christian manners and sermons. There should be no one who would notice if he made a little mistake. Rabito continued the ceremony while telling himself that.

– Anything is fine. Ad-lib. Ad-lib it.

“And do you swear to love, respect, and cherish your husband even when he cheats on you, or when you get bored of him and call off talks off marriage?”

The faces of the bride and groom looked like they twitched a bit, but Rabito could care less.

Rabito started this job when he was walking around Shibuya thanks to a scout. It seemed playing the role of minister at a wedding for foreigners was popular these days.

Rabito's father was American, and his appearance showed the prominence of his lineage. He had a large build with a muscular body with distinct facial features. He had a long nose and blue eyes. His nationality was Japanese and he was also fluent in the language, but from anyone who looked at Rabito he was seen as American. And so his daily wages was thirty thousand yen by pretending to be a foreigner and holding wedding ceremonies in broken Japanese with a bible in one hand.

The point was not for the wages. It was because it seemed fun. And just for that reason Rabito took this role. Rabito's father was the president of a big American company, so his family was wealthy. He had no trouble concerning himself over money. His job as a fake minister was just a way to kill time.

Rabito's real job was as a bounty hunter. Though he was still an apprentice.

Today he had a job at a ceremony site in Ikebukuro. They had planned to have

a real minister there, but on the appointed day he got food poisoning and Rabito was called up for it in an emergency and ended up taking his place.

It seems it was the wedding ceremony of a famous musician's daughter, so there were also famous people watching on the televisions among the invitees. *If I'm right – isn't he that the minister of justice, Matsuda, or something like that?* He had suffrage, but he was not too well informed on politics. He also did not have interest in politicians.

With the wedding ceremony safely (?) finished Rabito immediately went out into the city when he took his share for today's work from the staff. The large, 193 centimeter giant wearing a minister outfit stood out. But it was not so much for him to feel out of place in the city of Ikebukuro. There were plenty of people who wear gaudy outfits like bartender clothes, biker bang jackets, or weird cosplays, and it was not rare for a westerner like Rabito to be in this city with many foreigners. He often caught a glimpse of a black man pulling in guests for a sushi restaurant for one.

Just as he was passing in front of the gaming center Rabito suddenly stopped. He caught sight of a suspicious looking man looking around cautiously. The man's gaze was towards a young man and a young woman playing a crane game near the entrance of the facility. They were flirting – or more accurately the woman was clinging to the man.

The suspicious man sneaked up to the couple.

Rabito tilted his head wondering what he was planning to do. The next moment – the man's hand reached for the couple's bag left on the ground. He grabbed the handle of the two's belongings and stealthily dragged it over to himself. He stuffed it in his large bag, and then the man took off. The couple was engrossed in the game and did not take notice at all.

– It was luggage lifting.

“Ah!” Rabito pointed to the man and yelled.

He felt like he saw the man before.

– That face, it's the same as that guy's on the wanted poster!

“You there! Ikebukuro's luggage thief!”

There was no doubt. It was the bounty repeatedly stealing luggage in this neighborhood.

Having been pointed at by Rabito in a loud voice, the man was startled. In haste he dashed off, holding the belongings close.

"Ah, hey!" Rabito raised his voice. "Stop right there!"

Rabito immediately took out the bible he had put away in his garments. He took a large swing and threw it at him. The sharp edge of the thick book hit the man's head.

The luggage thief gave a pathetic whelp, "ow," at Rabito's cursed throw and fell on the spot.

"Don't you think you can run away from me!"

Rabito quickly got on top of the thief. Being pressed down on by a large body more than 190 centimeters tall had the man twisting his body in pain.

After struggling fiercely,

"Give up, fiend!"

The man readily lost consciousness when he gave a punch into his stomach.

In that period of time, he dug through the large bag the thief had. After looking through the contents of the wallets, he found an ID.

Reading the name written there aloud,

"....Zenji, Banba?"

Who's that? Rabito racked his brain.

The ID photo was a different man. – *So this bag is also stolen then?*

So coincidentally on top of having been able to catch a bounty, he also helped someone out. When he handed the stolen bag back to the couple, the woman thanked him gratefully, "Thank you for giving back Seiji-san's bag!" *Even though her belongings were stolen too for her to consider her boyfriend first must make her a pretty admirable woman.* Rabito admired that to himself.

They had said they were students of Raira academy, but they were truly an interesting couple. Even though a dispute happened right in front of them they

were unfazed by it. *The recent high schoolers are pretty tough*, huh, while surprised at that Rabito left Ikebukuro behind.

When he arrived at the western bar Dodge City in Shinjuku and carried the luggage thief inside,

“Welcome back, Rabi.”

The owner of the bar greeted him while wiping down the glasses. His name was Wyatt. His father’s younger brother – in other words Rabito’s uncle.

“Uncle,” Rabito handed over the wanted man he held under his arm to Wyatt. “I caught him. Ikebukuro’s Luggage Thief.”

“Ohh, nice. Good work.”

“This here are the belongings he stole.” He placed the traveling bag on top of the counter. “Return this to its owner.”

“Alright. I’ll have it sent to a police officer I know later.”

After tossing the man into the jail in the center of the counter space, he received his payment from Wyatt. It was just thirty thousand yen. It was loose change. *Guess I’ll have a drink with this*, he decided and snatched a bottle lined up on the shelf.

“Hey, I’m going to take this.”

He received a reproachful comment from Wyatt.

“It’s fine. Here, I’ll pay with this.” Rabito put the money he just received onto the counter. He pitched his voice even lower and acted cool. “I don’t need change.”

“.....Seriously.” Wyatt sighed. “You’re a damn cheeky kid. Which parent did you get that from?”

“I got this lovely trait of mine from either one.”

“I know.”

Giving a laugh, Rabito took a seat at the center table. After looking around the shop, “where’s that guy?” he asked.

Usually the part-time man was always helping out Wyatt here, but today he

did not see him. The man was a jerk of a bounty hunter who was two years older than him and acted like his superior. He would usually lunge at him for something, so he was glad for his absence.

"If you mean Tora he's out on a job."

"That's great. I can have my drink in quiet."

Rabito leaned back into his chair. He rested both his feet on top of the table. He skillfully removed the cork of the bottle with his teeth and chugged the whiskey down his throat.

Rabito watched the busy Wyatt while enjoying his drink after finishing a job. He was just about to remove one of the posters from the bulletin. It was the two hundred thousand bounty, the wanted poster of the 'Corrupted Bounty Hunter,' Masayuki Murai.

And that *he was removing it* meant –

"– Wait a second, uncle."

Rabito's eyes widened, and he sat up.

"It can't be; he was caught?"

"Yeah," Wyatt nodded. "Tora caught him today."

".....You're kidding."

Rabito slammed the bottle on the table and grasped his head.

"Don't kid with me! I was going to do it!"

And to do that he had payed that informant in Shinjuku. And he was just about to find out his location.

At that moment, at a timing as though he planned it, he got a call from the informant. He pressed the accept call button and placed the device to his ear.

"Yeah, it's you, huh. You got back to me at a good time. About that request, can you cancel it? I no longer need that information, so repay me back.
Eh? What? 'You already looked it up?' 'The price of cancellation is 100%' Hey, wait a second; don't kid me. Give me back my–"

– And there the call dropped.

"Damn him, that informant.....Hospitality won't do? And this is a business?"

He placed his cell phone back into his pocket while cursing to himself.

The wages for the information would not come back. However, he really did not care for the money. He could care less for that amount. However, the truth that the man he despised – Torakichi Nishino – had caused him to wastefully use money did not sit well with him. His anger was simmering deep inside him.

".....That bastard, snatching away my prey." The odious man's face appeared in his mind, and Rabito bore his teeth. "I won't forgive this!"

While looking at his nephew like that,

"Really now.....Why is it you guys are always at each other's throats?"

Wyatt gave a shrug with an exasperated expression.

"Well, having a rival isn't that bad though."

"Haa? Rival? I'm rivals with him, you say?" It was inexcusable. Rabito immediately rejected it. "That's not it. He's just an enemy to me. A great, natural enemy."

He did not get along with Torakichi Nishino since the first time he met him. And there would never be a time he would get along with him. That was what Rabito believed. Besides, he did not feel like ever getting along with him. Everything about him was the complete opposite of him. That man was a hardcore Hanshin Tigers fan, and being a Yomiuri Giants fan he made an enemy of him. The typical anti-Giants Torakichi (crazed Tiger). They had a cats and dogs relationship – no, they had a rabbit and tiger relationship.

– Damn it, that guy pisses me off to no end.

As he was gulping down the whiskey while fuming, Rabito suddenly remembered.

Just previous Wyatt had said, 'If you mean Tora, he's out on a job.'

A job meaning a bounty hunting one then. In other words that man was chasing down one of the wanted men.

Rabito stood up from his chair and stared hard at the bulletin.

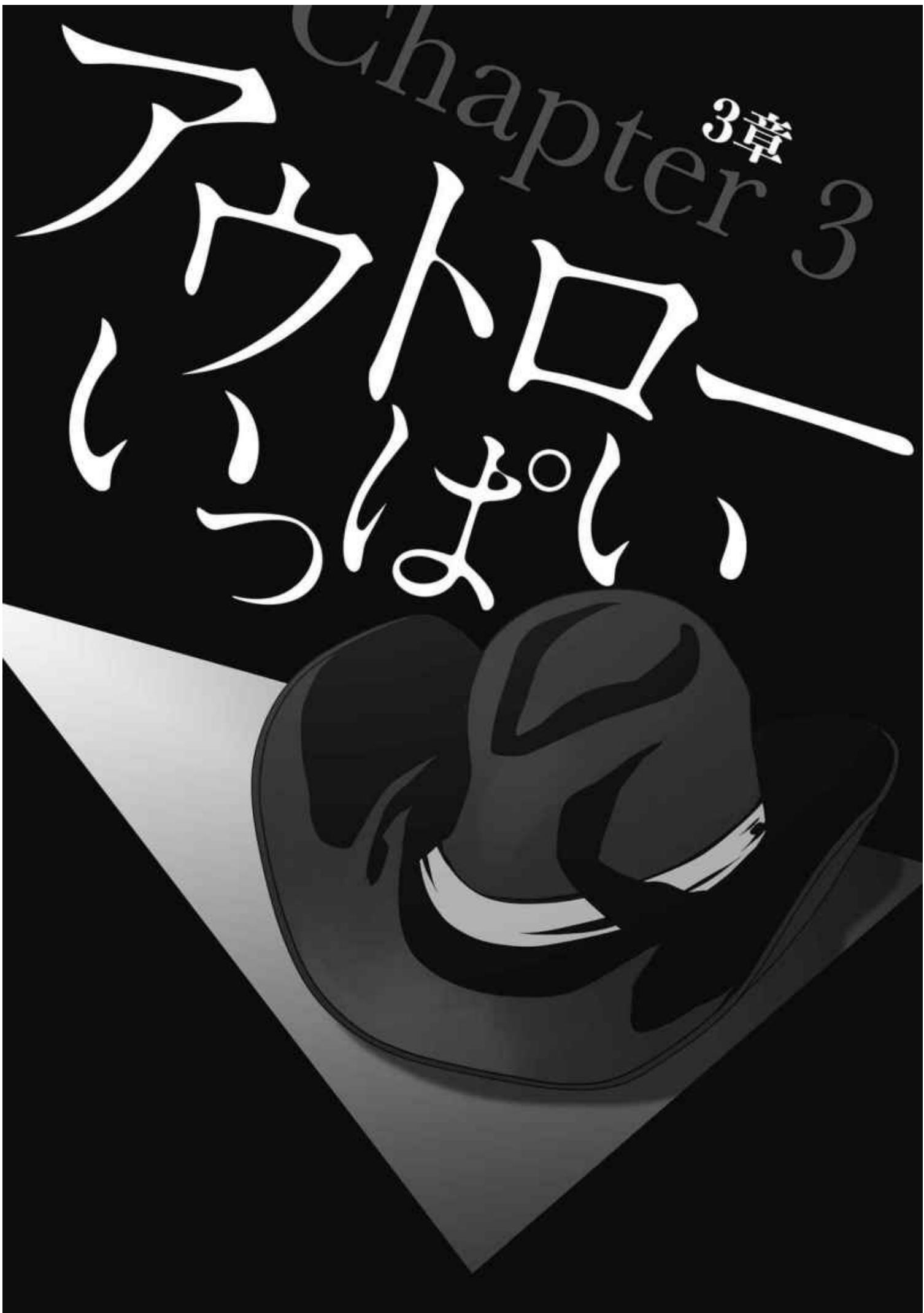
“.....Hey, uncle.” He called out to Wyatt. “Which one is he looking for right now?”

“What do you plan to do after asking that?”

“I know without me saying it, right?” Rabito gave a viscous smile. “I’m going to catch him first.”

Translation Notes:

1. Tora in Torakichi means Tiger, while the Ra in Rabito’s name stands for the character rabbit. Rabito is also the phonetic pronunciation of the English word “rabbit.”
But with their given kanji Torakichi (虎魂) means “tiger spirit” while Rabito (鬼人) means “rabbit person.” Torakichi is also a term referring to the Hanshin Tigers that his mother was a fan of.
2. Hanshin Tigers is a professional baseball team based in Nishinomiya, Hyogo Prefecture. The Yomiuri Giants is a professional baseball team based in Tokyo. I did see the term “torakichi” refer to hard-core fans of the Hanshin Tigers, though the spelling is slightly different than Torakichi’s name. So Rabito does mention his name like this but is referring to the “damn crazy tora fans” as well in that one line near the end.
If you are new to Kisaki’s work, she is a massive baseball fan. She will include something related to baseball if she has the opportunity.
3. Rabito’s name, “Minister with the Right Hand of the Devil” is similar to the character Trinity’s title from the western film, They Call Me Trinity. Trinity is the laid back, lazy one with the nickname “The Right Hand of the Devil.” It should also be mentioned while Rabito has similar traits to Trinity in this film, Torakichi also has similarities to Trinity’s half brother Bambino. The theme song of this film or franchise is the tune Torakichi was humming to in his introduction.



Chapter 3: Outlaws Everywhere

John Wayne had worked in the main office of Murder Inc. in Shinjuku until half a year ago. He would get on the crowded trains wearing a suit, follow his superior's orders as a company employee, and carried out the task of assassination.

However, there was no way a man like him who lived as he pleased could spend his time obediently in the company organization. John had the bad tastes in enjoying murder and also despised the people at the top of the company.

John being John was just about sick of being in the middle of the troublesome framework that was a company.

Murder Inc. had many clients. They also had many connections to antisocial organizations like gangs. On contrary to that, the scale of the influence of the company's work was limited. Since they took the countless requests they got from their gang clients they could not accept the request of assassinating a yakuza client. And those ties did not sit well with John. *Why do we have to take their well being into consideration? Shouldn't we kill whoever we like? Freely, no matter who it is. What are they so afraid of? If they offer money, I'll kill them –* he had thought blatantly.

John, not wanting to be tied by anything, made the conviction to become independent. He called out to several other co-workers that also were unsatisfied with the company and made this Wild Bunch Company a half a year ago.

Wilson was also one of the first members from then. Incidentally, Wilson was a nickname president John had given him, yet he was a native-born Japanese person.

At first they were a small company with a hand full of people, but having taken in some rouges from former color gangs and biker gangs in just a half a year the company had rose to have twenty people.

And so the Wild Bunch Company had become to be as a wild group that would kill anyone as long as they were given money for it. Even now having become the president, John's bad tastes did not change. Although it would be better to kill them right away, John would capture the target and torment them. Wilson felt admiration for how he thought up mean, cruel methods each and every time.

Just the day before, John ordered not just for a man to be captured but for his young daughter to be caught as well. And then he had gallows made in the multi-purpose room. He put the captured man onto the platform and placed a rope around his neck. He then showed the details to the elementary school daughter.

He would try to kill her father. The young girl had been crying and wailing in a high-pitched shrill for some time now.

He got close to her face and whispered detestably. "Your father will be executed now. He'll be hanged, and he'll die."

He was truly a man with terrible tastes for him to make a daughter watch her father die. However, John's ill tastes had far surpassed Wilson's expectations.

When he took out a gun,

"Save your father with this."

he said and handed it to the girl.

She grasped the black shape in her tiny hands and was forcibly made to brace it. The mouth of the handgun in the girl's hands was pointed at the rope above her father's head.

".....Taaaake a good shot, alright?"

He said with a grin, and John began the execution.

The moment he pulled the rope hanging from the gallows, the board at her father's feet opened. The man's body drastically dropped down, and the rope was constricting his throat.

Having lost his footing and being hung, the father twisted his body in strife. The girl's eyes opened wide at the sight and stared while shaking.

"Hey now, if you don't hurry up your father will die."

Urged on by John, the girl pulled the trigger. The sound of a gun discharging resounds, and the girl's body was thrown back greatly from the recoil.

Rather than an expert, there was no chance a normal elementary schooler could make the feat of having the bullet hit the rope hanging her father. Her target had greatly been missed, and the shot the daughter took hit her father in his torso.

Her father that had been struggling gave out a cry and then his movements suddenly stopped.

And in the room having turned deep quiet,

" – Too bad. You missed."

John's cheerful voice stated.

The girl was struck with terror at the scene before her. The hand holding the gun is shaking bit by bit.

After ordering to his subordinates to take down her father's unmoving body, John went around to her back and moved up towards her ear.

"You killed him."

His lips curled up into a smile, and he repeated it in a whisper.

"You killed your father."

– No, she didn't.

Wilson knew. That the gun was just a tranquilizer gun. She just put her father to sleep. He should still narrowly be breathing.

However, from the young girl's perspective it could not be helped for her to mistake it as killing her own father.

And John had dared to set it up that way. He played around too much.

"Do you hate me? Me who forced you to kill your father? Hey, you hate me right? In the next twenty years become a sexy gun woman like Sharon Stone and come back to me for vengeance. I'll accept a challenge any time if it's a dual."

John, in an apparent good mood, talked at length expressively. But his words did not reach the girl. She lost consciousness due to the excessive shock.

"Someone send this girl near her home." John shrugged his shoulders and said that, pointing to the girl collapsed on the floor with his chin. Giving a glance at the president's smirking face, Wilson gave a sigh. "Will it be fine doing this?"

He was letting the witness go. They should kill that girl as well originally. No, there was no need to bring the girl here in the first place. Just for John to mess around and getting the company involved in some trouble has not started right now though.

"What are we going to do if the police rush over? If investigators happen upon the company-"

"Then at that time we can kill the police."

This man said something reckless as always. *I won't get through to him*, Wilson could only sigh in his mind.

By the way, John changed the topic. "How did that traitor case go?"

That traitor. This was also a head throbbing problem.

Among the first members, there was a spy sent in by Murder Inc. They let out the company's information to the outside, but they covered their tracks of it being leaked out in a hurry.

The strength of the Wild Bunch Company was that it was shrouded in mystery. The company name and employee names were all fake, and they used delinquents belonging to local color gangs as pawns for contacting with their clients or targets. Their hideout place would also periodically change. And so like the week before last John had shot the Awakaku Group's executive candidate without hesitation.

However, if there was a spy in the company that was a different matter. If their information had passed to Murder Inc., with them being on good terms with the Medei Group, they would naturally leak information to the Awakusu Group. If they knew the Wild Bunch Company was involved in the disappearance of their executive candidate, then the Awakusu Group should be looking for the whereabouts of the spy right now. If the spy was handed over to

their side and everything of the details comes to light, then the Wild Bunch Company would certainly be retributed.

Right now they still did not have a clear grasp of their information so they were not meddling in their affairs, but it would only be a matter of time for their hideout to be breached.

As part of the company on top of having to capture the spy quickly and prevent more information from leaking out, they had to even torture them to tell them of the contents of the leaked information and of their enemy's movements.

"Just as you said, I made a post on the underground site."

Under John's orders Wilson put out a bounty on the spy on Undergroundjobs.com, Tokyo. He wrote, assuming themselves as the NPB, 'For those who catch this man we will pay a bounty of three hundred thousand yen. The people to hand him over to is at the NPB.'

"Go as the recipient. We need to confirm his face after all."

"I do not mind that," but Wilson could not understand it. "But why are we putting out a bounty and have an amateur look for him? It would be quicker and safer if one of us did it."

"If it is known we are looking for him, it may catch the Awakusu Group's eye. After all they're looking for him too."

John lit his preferred cigar and grinned.

"Besides, Wilson-kun. When I look at this, I'm fairly pissed. I'll have him receive as much pain as we can until I kill him. Do you think he could psychologically handle being chased by complete strangers, let alone by a whole crowd of them? How about it?"

Another bad habit of his then? Wilson thought to himself. He was a tremendously sadistic man.

"However, is the bounty not a waste?"

The person who captured the spy would receive a reward of three hundred thousand yen. It was a pointless expense.

However,

“Ahh, about that.”

John said dismissively while smoking his cigar.

“As if we’re gonna pay up.”

Of course.

John was that sort of man.

– This had gotten serious.

Shinta Kasaoka was unbelievably impatient.

Half a year ago around the time gossip of John Wayne’s independence began to rise up someone in the upper stratum of Murder Inc had made contact with Kasaoka. Kasaoka, having debt, jumped at the deal. He would receive plentiful amounts of money just by working as John’s subordinate and periodically reporting to a member of Murder Inc. It was a juicy deal. He had spent half a year continuing as a spy until just the previous day. A co-worker had witnessed him meeting up with a member of Murder Inc as he was reporting on how the Wild Bunch Company worked for the month.

And since then Kasaoka had ended up being chased by guys he did not know by face or name. All of them were probably sent out under the suggestion of the Wild Bunch Company. John may have put out a large sum of money and hired assassins. It had to be it; it could not be anything else.

John Wayne – that man was a demon. If he got caught, then his life will be toyed with.

He just did not want to become John’s toy. Kasaoka frantically continued his life on the run. He had been moving from place to place in the city, and right now he was hiding in an abandoned building in a certain place in Ikebukuro. Usually a group of young kids hang out here often, but right now no one was present.

Taking cover, Kasaoka took out his cellphone. He makes a call to a certain number right away.

[– Hey] The other picked up immediately. It was a member of Murder Inc.

[Where are you? I've called you numerous times already. The Awakusu Group wanted to talk with-]

"I got into trouble." Kasaoka cut off the man's words and told him. "Help me."

He also could not trust them, but right now he had no one else to rely on.

"It was let out to John that I'm your guys' spy."

The other man's breath got caught. [How did it get out?]

"I was seen by one of them when I was with you. If I'm caught, I'll be killed."

[Then don't get caught.]

"Don't say it like it's not your problem!"

Kasaoka yelled. He violently kicked the drum nearby and clutched his head.

"It's all your guys' fault! Since you guys came to me with that deal! That's why I'm in this mess!"

He immediately shut his mouth. He could be found by someone if he was too loud. By the multiple assassins John sent out.

".....If I get caught and tortured," Kasaoka threatened. "I'll tell them everything. It's John. You won't be let off on it either. You'll be put out on the streets."

After moments of silence,

[.....Alright.]

The other agreed in an intimidating voice.

[We will protect you.]

"Please do that."

[Where are you now?]

"I'm in an abandoned building in Ikebukuro."

When he explained his location in more detail,

[We will come get you later. Don't move from there.]

Kasaoka was a little bit relieved at the man's words. He dropped the call and

gave a big sigh.

With his back against the drum, he sat down on the ground. Anxiety rose up again in his mind. *Would they really come to get him? That man does not plan to discard him, right? Or they could kill him to keep his mouth permanently shut.*

As soon as he begun to doubt there was no end to it.

At a corner of a narrow street lined with signs of suspicious-looking shops in a place a little ways from Ikebukuro station, the weapon's merchant Hugo was quietly working.

When the door inside of the multi-tenant building on the third floor opened, "¡Hola, amigo!"

The man wearing a sombrero and poncho cheerfully greeted Tora. His appearance was very Mexican-like, and he had an easygoing personality where he could imagine him holding maracas or a guitar and start singing.

"¿Que onda? How are you?"

Hearing the mix of Spanish and Japanese, Tora readily replied with "I'm not bad."

"Bien, bien."

Hugo was an acquaintance since he started this job. His store outwardly seemed to be a specialized store for air guns or model guns, but in actuality it was a place of smuggled weapons and fire arms acquired from his home land, Mexico's drug cartels, Russia's weapon arms businesses, and Vietnam's backyard moonshine villages. It was famous among the bounty hunters, and many other hunters came here.

On the store's every wall or in every show case were dummy toy guns. The real merchandise were stored in a secret room further inside.

Today there was a black box placed on top of the counter case. Its shape was unfamiliar to him. It was long for a gun case and far too narrow as well.

"What is this box?"

When Tora asked this,

"Ahh, that. It's called a *youtou*."

Huge spread out both hands and answered him.

"...A demon blade?"

When he opened the case, stowed away there was a black scabbard of a Japanese sword.

"It seems the owner of this takes form of a blade and is possessed. 'This blade is a demon blade,' they kept saying. So since then I got too scared to pull it out of the scabbard."

Hugo explained the details.

"They also said it's creepy and to take it for free, so I brought this to my store. My place isn't a recycling joint though."

"Uh-uh," he hums to himself. "A demon blade, huh....."

Tora bent forward and stared closely inside the case. No matter how he looked at it, it seemed like a normal blade though.

"Tora, do you want this? I'll give it for free."

"Don't need it."

Tora shook his head, "I have these after all," and pointed to the two Colts.

" – That's right, talking about demon blades."

Hugo recalled something.

"Wasn't there the Slasher just awhile back?"

"Yeah," he thought back and nodded. "That Ripper Night guy, right?"

It was the incident with consecutive slashings that occurred several months ago. The media was making a fuss over it for a while.

"Si," Hugo lowered his voice and said. "There's rumor that it had something to do with a demon blade as well."

"Huh"

Tora responded apathetically. *As if*, he laughed in his mind. He had no interest in the occult based rumors. Besides, his weapon of choice was guns. Swords

were not correlated with him. Hereafter he would not feel obligated to demon blades either.

“ – By the way,” Hugo brought up the main topic. “What do you want today?”

“I’ve got a job. Give me the usual.”

When he requested for the bullets for his revolver, “one for a thousand yen,” Hugo told him.

“That’s expensive,” he unconsciously spoke out loud. “The price went up quite a bit. Did something happen?”

“Seems the Russian company I get them from has been in a mess recently. Goods haven’t been coming in much even to my shore.”

Originally he wanted to buy a pack, but unfortunately he was low on money. He decided to purchase enough of what he needed. “I’ll buy ten bullets, so make it half price.”

“No.”

He was denied it flat out right.

However, he could not back down on it so easily. “Then, eight thousand yen. Please, Hugo. It’s tough on me this month. The new year started, so my expenses went up for my brother’s text books and school uniforms.”

“Tora, quit it. And this is why you’re called an indigent by Rabi.”

“Don’t mention that money bags bastard.”

Tora recalled the man’s face and grimaced. If it was that wealthy gorilla kid he could buy more than the pack but this store itself. Just imagining it irritated him. He frowned deeply just for thinking about it.

Tora reluctantly took out ten-thousand yen from his wallet and paid up.

“Who’re you going to catch this time?” Hugo asked.

“A hit-man. Seems he’s a former employee of Murder Inc. I asked an informant to find his location.”

“By informant do you mean the one in Shinjuku?”

"That's the one."

When Tora nodded, Hugo made an openly unpleasant face. "Ohh, you shouldn't use him. I don't hear good rumors about him. He's malo. Malo."

Thinking of the informant's creepy smiling face had Tora make a wry smile.

"Well, he's definitely an untrustworthy guy, but he's information is accurate. I'll use what I can."

In order to support his family he cannot choose other options.

He could not bargain a better deal in the end, but in exchange Hugo gave him an additional free bullet. He loads the purchased bullets into the two Colts, and he inserts the remaining ones into his gun belt.

"Well then," Tora placed a hand on the brim of his hat. "See you later, Hugo."

"¡Chao Chao!"

After giving his farewells to Hugo, Tora turned over the cuffs of his coat and left.

As he was walking Tora hummed a tune. It was a tune of a certain western film, and if he recalled right the movie was about a wandering gunman struggling between two powers. There was a brutal, macaroni-like scene with the protagonist being caught and tormented by his enemy, and they hurt his dominant hand to the point he could no longer use a gun. Perhaps he got influenced by the film, but once Tora began this kind of work he trained himself to shoot with both hands. So he would be able to blow a hole into their head with the opposite hand even if by one in a million chance he was caught by the enemy and his dominant hand was crushed.

It was why the two Colts hanging from his hip gave him the name among bounty hunters, "The Double-Hand Gun Tiger."

As he was humming the tune with a pout and proceeded to his destination, after awhile he entered Sunshine 60 Street. The sorrowful melody was blown away by the hustle and bustle of the city, Ikebukuro.

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UNINVITED



Chapter
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Chapter 4: UNINVITED

The wedding ceremony and reception had finished, and as the place of the event was going to change and the garden party where the celebs would gather, Enokida exited the internet cafe he concealed himself in. The time was already past the evening, and the city of Ikebukuro was dyed in an orange color.

“ – So you really were here.”

Suddenly being called out in front of the building, Enokida came to a halt. When he turned around, a slim, elderly gentleman stood there.

“Geh”

Enokida winced. He terribly recalled who the man dressed up nice the same as him was.

“Yagi!”

This man – Yagi – was a servant of Enokida’s family. He was a man who would follow any of his father’s orders and had looked after Enokida during his childhood. It was also him who had informed him of Miyoko’s wedding.

Who knew he would have been found even though he had undergone the lengths to outwit this man by hiding in an internet cafe like this.

“.....How did you figure it out?”

When Enokida glared at him suspiciously,

“I can foresee the young master’s thoughts.”

Yagi said and narrowed his eyes.

“I can guess your thoughts too.”

Enokida ultimately decided to not sneak into the party. It was because among the wedding ceremony attendants he had seen that man (his father). And so he grasped Yagi’s true motive: why he had notified him of Miyoko’s marriage in the first place.

"You used Miyoko-sensei as an excuse to call me out to Tokyo and planned to have me meet with that man, but it won't happen."

"My now, you figured it out?"

Yagi chuckled calmly.

This man had the tendency of wanting to get him and his father to reunite. He wanted to improve the discord between their parent and child relationship.

More than that, Enokida changed the topic.

"Why are you here?"

"Will you not go?"

"I don't have to be next to that man then?"

"No. The master has a bodyguard with him."

".....That's right. He became the Minister of Justice."

"You were aware? So you really do have your father on your mind."

"This is in the field of general common knowledge."

This spring Enokida's father, Kazuo Matsuda, had accomplished entering the cabinet ministers. Right now as the Minister of Justice he was thoroughly engrossed in his work. And that was why he did not think he would be attending Miyoko-sensei's ceremony.

"Even though he's busy, he comes out for that person's ceremony. And even for the second party too."

"Miyoko-san is beloved by the master as well. Like a true daughter."

"Ah, is that right."

Enokida curtly replied back and shrugged his shoulders.

" – Young master." Yagi inquired as Enokida turning on his heel. "Where will you be going now? You must be tired from the long travel, so how about resting at your home? I have a car waiting as well."

"I won't take up the offer."

Enokida snorted. *As if I would go back to that house.*

"I'm going to hang out at an acquaintance's place now." Enokida turned back around and grinned. "I came all the way to Tokyo, so I got a job to do." After departing with Yagi, Enokida flagged down a taxi and headed to Shinjuku. The place he visited was a western bar called 'Dodge City,' and it was a shop an acquaintance of his runs.

As the name suggested the interior decorations were a Western theme. When he pushed the sliding door open and entered inside, the owner turned around. Seeing Enokida, he gave a broad smile, "this is a rare guest."

"It's been awhile, Wyatt." Enokida raised one of his hands and responded.

The man's name was Wyatt Westwood. He was an employee of the NPB, the Nippon Professional Bounty Hunter Organization, and he was also the captain of the grass-lot baseball team the Tokyo Sukiyaki Westerns they would be playing against in the next practice game.

Wyatt was one of Enokida's clients, and even now they have exchanged information over the phone on occasion, but it had been awhile since they met directly.

"What's up, Enokida? You here to observe your enemy's positions before the game?"

"That's not it," Enokida shook his head. "Just in the mood for a drink."

"Is that right?" Wyatt smiled. "Well then, take a seat. I'll bring out some alcohol and snacks. What would you like?"

"Hmm, I guess a beer first."

"If that's the case then should we do fried potatoes? Or should we do a platter of Vienna?Ahh, we also have chicken."

"Potatoes. And bring out chopsticks."

"Okay."

Just as instructed he took a seat at one of the table seats.

"By the way," Wyatt recalled. "I heard one of your teammates couldn't come?"

"Ahh, yeah." Enokida nodded. "Our third-baseman. Seems a job came in."

Their teammate Saeki would always be defending third base, but on sudden notice he became unable to travel with them for the expedition. He was asked an underground job from a long-term client and he could not turn it down. Since Saeki was also the director at the cosmetic surgery clinic he was usually busy anyway.

"Genzo-san said he's looking for a standin right now."

The Ramens was a team of nine. There were nine positions in baseball. Without one, they could not play a game.

"In the worst case scenario, we can have the outfield be protected by an elementary school girl or borrow one of your guys."

Wyatt finished with, "It'd be great if you found someone," and headed to the kitchen.

While he was waiting for him Enokida decided to do some work. He was asked by Lin to look up a certain man.

– Shinta Kasaoka.

When he was looking him up in the internet cafe earlier, he learned Kasaoka was a former employee of Murder Inc. He quit the company about a half a year ago. He infiltrated his cell phone data that was listed in the contract and took a glance over the call history, but all of them were signaling from the center of Tokyo. *Why is Lin who should be in Fukuoka looking into a man from Tokyo?* He was curious, but before he did any unnecessary searches he decided to concentrate on his work first.

As he was hacking into Shinta Kasaoka's whereabouts, he saw there was frequent movement. Based off the speed he seemed to have used trains, buses, or taxis at random and was on the run with no definite destination. Kasaoka himself was probably aware he was being hunted down.

Will he stop in one place somewhere? Enokida decided to set a trap to push for that moment. The display on the computer screen flashed and was now letting him know the target was making a phone call somewhere.

Attempting to eavesdrop on the conversation Enokida put in earphones in both his ears and clicked on the record button.

[– Hey] A man spoke. [Where are you? I've called you numerous times already. The Awakusu Group wanted to talk with-]

[I got into trouble. Help me.]

– It was the voice of another man. This one was probably Kasaoka.

[It was let out to John that I'm your guys' spy.]

– Spy?

[If I'm caught, I'll be killed.]

[Then don't get caught.]

[Don't say it like it's not your problem! It's all your guys' fault! Since you guys came to me with that deal! That's why I'm in this mess-] Kasaoka's yelling suddenly stopped. After a moment he continued in a quieter voice like a whisper. [If I get caught and tortured, I'll tell them everything. It's John. You won't be let off on it either. You'll be put out on the streets.]

After a moment of silence, the person on the other side of the call answered, [...Alright.]

[We will protect you.]

[Please do that.]

[Where are you right now?]

[I'm in an abandoned building in Ikebukuro.]

Kasaoka told the other in detail of his location.

[We will come get you later. Don't move from there.]

– And the call ended there.

Don't move from there, huh. This is most convenient. Attaching the address of the abandoned building Kasaoka was in and a map, Enokida sent an e-mail to Lin. With this his job was done.

Just as he shut his laptop Wyatt brought in the beer and fried potatoes.

As they were wandering around the city of Ikebukuro at night and killing time an e-mail came in from Enokida. He seemed to have figured out Kasaoka's location. There was an address and a map attached in the e-mail.

"Says he's in an abandoned warehouse in Ikebukuro," Lin said while looking at the attached map. "It's a little ways from here."

Banba and them were in the entertainment district next to the station right now. Their targeted location was rather far, but they did not have the money for a taxi. The two headed towards the abandoned factory on foot.

After walking for a bit, they saw a silhouette. They heard voices disputing. *What is it?* Lin and Banba's eyes widened, and they looked at each other. While hiding in the shadows of the building, they peeked around to see what is going on.

In the middle of the street, there were two men. One had dread-locks. The other had blond hair. He was wearing sun glasses so they could not see his face well, but he seemed to be a young man. He was wearing bartender clothes.

"This is problematic for us, not paying for what you bought."

The dread-hair man said with a gentle tone.

The two stood there, blocking the way of a delinquent. For some reason the atmosphere felt restless. *Is it money collecting?* Lin tilted his head in thought.

"Sh-shuddup!" The hoodlum man raised his voice. "Get the hell outta the way, you-"

The next moment, the hoodlum took out a knife from his pocket and swung it.

"Move! Don't get close to me!"

The tip of the knife grazed the blond man. He barely missed it, but the black vest of his bartender clothes got cut.

".....My clothes....."

The man in the bartender outfit murmured.

One beat later,

"You ruined the clothes I got from him, you bastaarrd-"

In the quiet alleyway, a shout of anger responded.

And then-surprisingly, the man pulled out the “One Hour Parking” sign nearby.

“-Ha!?”

Lin’s eyes popped out of his head. What was even more shocking was that the man gripped the sign with both hands and made a full swing with it. He could not believe it.

-What the hell is that man? Is he really human?

Lin was shocked.

“.....What is he.....a monster.....?!”

The sign he swung clipped the hoodlum. And then his body was shot away easily.

“Ahh~” While watching, the dread hair man, not even surprised, placed a hand on his head and sighed. “Again, huh.”

The man in bartender clothes after his rampage approached the dread haired man as though nothing had happened. “.....Tom-san.”

“You feeling better?”

“Yes.” He nodded in honesty. “Let’s go to the next one.”

“Put that back in its proper place.”

Just as he said, the bartender man thrust the street sign back to its former position. And then he left while calmly conversing with the dread-lock man.

The vicinity returned to being quiet again. What was left here was the hoodlum sunk into the concrete wall and the one hour street sign pierced into the ground slantingly.

Since the storm had passed,

“.....H-hey, Banba.” Lin called out to the man next to him. “Did you see that just now?”

Gazing at him from the side, Banba was also just as shocked as him. His eyes

were wide, and his mouth hung open. "Yeah, I seen it." He answered in a whisper.

"He's amazing, that fella.....I haven't a-seen none a smooth swing like that."

"Not that!"

He unconsciously raised his voice.

To others they should be more shocked than anything, yet Banba calmly analyzed the man in the bartender outfit's batting form. "He done a good swing. The tilt of his body was good, and the orbit of his batting was smooth."

"What he swung wasn't a bat but a street sign!"

"He could be a perfect slugger." Banba placed his hand of his chin and hummed with a serious expression. "If he could hit a solid ball, I wonder if he could hit the signboard of Yahuoku! Dome....."

"Do you only think of baseball?!"

Lin held his head.

I can't believe it. That bartender guy and this baseball idiot next to me.

"You reckon' he has an interest in baseball? Which team would he be a part in? Maybe our pinch hitter?"

Banba talked on on the subject with lit-up eyes and tried to go pursue after the bartender man.

"I'm gonna do some scoutin'."

"Stop, idiot!"

He hastily grabbed Banba by the scruff of his neck and pulled him back.

"You can tell he's dangerous just by watching him, right?! Don't get involved!"

"There ain't no one bad who makes such a perfect form and swing."

"Of course there are! You're way too blind when it comes to baseball!"

Lin sighed heavily and returned to the main topic. ".....Besides we're not in a position to mess around."

They had to go catch that bounty right now. They did not have time to recruit

anyone for their grass-lot baseball team.

"What will we do if he gets picked up by others first?" They could not let their source of income to get away. "I absolutely will not be camping in a park."

Banba reluctantly agreed at Lin's reasoning.

After roughly five minutes of walking the abandoned building in question came into view. They cautiously stepped inside the dim space lightened only by the moonlight. Lin went in first with Banba following behind. Their footsteps resounded in the silence of the building.

It was when they took a few more paces.

"You guys were slow getting here!"

They suddenly heard a yell. From the pitch black darkness a man jumped out. It was the same man in the photo – Shinta Kasaoka.

"You made me wait for so -"

Looking between their faces closely, Kasaoka's breath got caught in his throat.

"Wh-who are you?! You're not the guys from the company!?"

They did not know who these guys from whatever company were, but Lin and Banba were not part of any company so it was definitely not them. Lin nodded.
"Well, that's about right."

The man braced himself and yelled. "It can't be; are you John's lackeys!?"

".....John? Who's that?"

When Lin tilted his head in question,

"How 'bout you take a breather." Banba spoke up next to him. "We don't gotta kill you. You got a bounty on your head, so we just came to catch you."

Don't give such a polite explanation, Lin's shoulders slumped.

Either way it did not change they were his enemies. Kasaoka's face turned pale.

"Uwaaa"

While crying out he dashed towards the exit.

“Like we’d let you get away!”

Lin moved. He shifted around him and lied in wait for the bounty. He was probably thinking he could break through if it was just some weak girl. The man rushed madly at Lin without dropping any speed.

“Get outta the waaay!”

Kasaoka raised up his arms. It was a simple attack. It was easy to see.

Lin bent over and while dodging the attack he gave in punch in his solar plexus with his fist. “Ugwah,” Kasaoka groaned softly. His body bent in on itself, and he crumbled to the ground.

“.....You didn’t kill him right?” Banba said while peering at Kasaoka’s face.

“Of course. They said to take him in alive.”

That was what was written on the post on UndergroundJobs.com.

“That was a pleasant job. Just for catching one small fry we’ll get 300,000.” Lin narrowed his eyes. “Wonder if I should change careers too.”

Now they just had to call the number and get their reward. Lin tried to take out his smartphone, but that was when it happened.

Somewhere they heard humming. The melodramatic melody and the clinking of metal with footsteps were coming closer.

“.....Ah? What’s this?”

When they turned around, there was a silhouette at the entrance. A man was standing there. When the man spotted Lin and Banba he spoke, his shoulders slumping.

“ – Well this sucks; someone else got here first.”

He said and gave a wry smile. It was a young man wearing a hat and in a cowboy getup.

Just who is this person?

Lin stared at him and frowned. “.....Who is this cosplaying guy?”

Banba next to him whispered, “Lin-chan can’t say that about others either,”

but he ignored it.

Having received the information from the informant in Shinjuku, Tora headed to Kasaoka's hiding place. It was an abandoned building in Ikebukuro. It was a remote place, but it would have to be to hide away in.

That man's information was accurate. Inside was Kasaoka.

Afterwards he just had to catch the bounty the usual way by threatening him with a gun and hand him over to Wyatt, but the job this time was a bit irregular.

“ – Well this sucks; someone else got here first.”

Tora whispered out loud.

Inside the abandoned building were people other than Kasaoka. The wanted man he was searching for seems to be unconscious. He was collapsed on the floor, not moving. Next to him stood a man and a woman. It was a pair he did not know.

“You two are unfamiliar faces.”

– Are they the same as me?

He did not recall them so they did not seem to be bounty hunters working in Tokyo. *Are they some wanderers from elsewhere?*

“Who are you?”

When Tora asked that in a stern voice the woman cursed back with, “and just who the hell are you, you cosplaying freak.” What a foulmouthed woman.

“I’m a bounty hunter.” Tora gave a short reply and pointed at the fallen Kasaoka. “And that is my prey.”

He analysed the situation once more calmly. There were two opponents against him. He was at a disadvantage in numbers. He reconsidered Wyatt’s warning briefly. Though considering that there was no way he could back down quietly. His income for this month was tight. “Sorry, but I’ll be taking him.”

“As if we’d hand him over. Don’t kid with us. We’re the ones who caught him.” The woman snorted. “We’re in a tight situation too. We need money.”

– Their aim is for the money. Then they do the same profession as me.

It was not rare at all for fellow bounty hunters to run into each other when chasing down the same prey. *My luck was bad*, Tora tutted.

"I'll take him by force. I'll be your opponent." The woman laughed provocatively. She then addressed her male companion. "Hey, Banba. Leave this to me."

I feel like letting lose a bit, she was grinning. What an outrageous woman.

"Take that man and hide somewhere." The woman pointed at Kasaoka while saying that.

"Careful not to get yourself killed now," the man picked up Kasaoka as instructed. "There's no one I can count on in Tokyo, so it'll be a pain if you get yourself up and killed."

The man left with that warning and hid himself with Kasaoka behind the drum.

"I know. It's fine if I go easy, right?" The woman said with a sigh mixed in.

– Go easy, she said?

Isn't she underestimating me quite a bit?

A smile crept up on his face as he felt the anger rise up at the woman's words. "I have a principle to not fight with women though."

"Acting all gentleman like," the woman shrugged her shoulders. "Don't worry, I'm a man."

"That's right," From behind the drum can the man peeked his head out. "Lin-chan is a boy~"

– A man?

Tora stared at him closely. *Then does that mean he is just dressing up as a woman? No matter how I look at him he looks like a woman, but now that he mentioned it I can see his build is more angular.*

Either way, if it's a man that's fine by me.

"Is that so."

Tora moved both of his hands quickly.

“If that’s the case then without holding back.”

– I’ll make the first move.

Tora immediately pulled out his two guns from the holster. He took aim while cocking them and pulled the triggers of both in his left and right hand at the same time. – It was just under a second.

I got him, he had thought. He planned to hit him in his limbs and prevent him from moving.

However, the cross-dressing man in front of him had vanished.

“Wha-”

– Where did he go? Where is he?

Tora’s gaze briskly wandered around the area and searched for him.

“ – Don’t look away.”

He suddenly heard a voice beside him, and Tora’s breath was caught in his throat. The cross-dresser man brandished his knife and took a swing. He threw out his left hand immediately and blocked the blade with the gun. The metallic sound rang and the impact ran up his arm. This man looked weak, but he had quite a bit of strength. Unable to block it, Tora staggered back.

When he tried to point the gun at the other, holding himself on his right foot, but the cross-dresser man tried to move around to Tora’s backside. He restlessly moved around him as so he could not get a lock on him. Tora turned his body around, held up his guns with both hands and tried to catch his target. He pulled the trigger in both hands once again. However, his opponent was faster. The two shots pierced into the walls of the abandoned building.

Damn, he cursed. I missed. I wasted two thousand yen.

His opponent’s weapon was a knife. Naturally he would go for a close-combat. If it was that he was at a disadvantage. Tora tried to make some distance from his opponent by firing off a few shots as a threat. He pulled the trigger in his right hand in succession.

“ – Don’t you run off.”

The cross-dresser man comprehended his objective. As he was retreating he thrust the knife towards Tora trying to point the knife at his throat. Twisting his body, Tora dodged the attack very nearly.

He suddenly realized.

– It can't be is this man.....a killer?

His movements – these were the movements of a killer. He was aiming for a person's vital points without restraint or hesitation. It was a one-sided defensive battle.

Desperate to not let him get close and just dodge, he could not fix his aim with the revolver. His breathing quickened. "Shit," he cursed. This man was good.

– So was I the wrong who underestimated him?

After Tora slipped out a wry smile he gritted his teeth.

He did not even have the composure to hold up his guns and pull the trigger. He protected himself with the guns from his opponents relentless attacks. The knife and the gun collided.

This time there was a kick to his left hand. The Colt fell out of Tora's hand by the impact and drops to the ground. He had aimed for his gun since the beginning. He probably planned to take the weapons from Tora and rob him of his means to attack. What Tora had left was the Colt in his right hand.

At some point he had been cornered against the wall. The man approached him slowly step by step.

"– Stop."

Tora held up his right gun and pointed it at the other's face. Even so the man did not flinch. He did not stop.

"I'll shoot." Tora threatened him once again.

"Then shoot," the cross-dresser man smiled. He had a composed expression. "If you can."

"You're rather cocky."

"I've used those guns in the past."

The man pointed with his chin to Tora's weapon and grinned.

"You've run out of bullets, haven't you?"

Tora's eyes nearly popped out at those words.

– He sees through my bluff.

It was as the man had said. The gun in Tora's right hand was out of bullets. The other noticed that. And so he aimed for the gun in his right hand that had the possibility of still having bullets in his previous attack.

– This man, it can't be, he figured it out?

The man fully knew how many shots Tora took. He figured it out in this tense sort of situation and in the middle of the fight. What composure. What observational skills. Tora's eyes were wide.

"Bounty hunters sure are halfhearted."

The man's eyes narrowed. It was the cold eyes of a murderer.

– This isn't good. This is really bad.

His heart was pounding hard. He felt sweat under his hat.

I'm going to be killed, he thought.

– It was then.

"I know you're hiding in here, Kasaoka! How about you come out quietly!"

He heard an outrageous voice as though the world was making fun of him.

"The great Rabito Westwood has come to catch you!"

Rabito Westwood – Tora frowned at the annoying name.

When he moved his gaze towards the entrance, there stood a large man wearing priest clothes.

Rabito, having received the whereabouts of Shinta Kasaoka from the informant, immediately headed to the abandoned warehouse in Ikebukuro.

However that hateful man, Torakichi Nishino, was there already.

Damn, he got here before me again. It was only a moment he frowned at that. When he looked closer something was off. Tora was standing with his back against the wall. His beloved Colt seems to be out of bullets and he was unarmed. The woman in front of him was holding a knife and was trying to make an attack at Tora. No matter how he thought of it, he was cornered.

– Huh? Isn’t he in quite the pinch?

What the heck, isn’t this interesting?

Rabito grinned,

“What’s this? What’s this now? Isn’t that our little fearsome tiger?”

and he addressed him mockingly.

“My, what a coincidence. Just what are you doing around here?!”

“.....And why the hell are you here too,” Tora replied back in a groaning voice, grinding his molars. He was making a truly resentful expression.

“Could it be, could it be, you had a hard time up against a woman? No waay, your opponent is just one person! Isn’t that harsh?”

“It wasn’t one! It’s two!”

Tora yelled and pointed further within the abandoned building.

And then,

“Ah,” from behind the drum can a man poked his head out. “No, go ahead, go ahead. Don’t mind me.”

He had ruffled hair and a gentle expression. *Huh, he thought. That is a face I feel like I’ve seen before. Where was it? I can’t remember.*

Before that right now there was work. Rabito turned back to Tora and stated. “Well, it doesn’t matter how many there are. Shall I have the great Rabito save you? Hm?”

“As if I need you to save me! Leave already!”

Tora bore his teeth and yelled.

“You’re not honest all at.”

Rabito shrugged his shoulders a bit forced.

“Well, just hold your horses. I’ll save you right now.”

Reaching for his pocket he took out the revolver he swiped from Wyatt. The moment he saw that Tora’s face turned pale.

“Stop it, idiot! Seriously stop!”

Ignoring Tora’s cries for him to stop or to not shoot, Rabito cocked the gun, brandished it and aimed it at the woman.

“Amen.”

He whispered and pulled the trigger. Immediately after a gunshot resounded in the abandoned building.

– At the same time though,

“Gyaa!”

There was also a yell from Tora.

Just as Rabito pulled the trigger the woman who attacked Tora immediately retreated. The bullet that was meant for the woman greatly veered off and hit the brim of Tora’s hat. His favorite cowboy hat was blown off his head and fell down onto the floor of the abandoned building.

“ – Where the hell were you aiming, you amateuuuur!”

Tora was beyond furious.

“That was too close! It grazed me!”

“Sorry you were so close to the woman.”

“I was far enough away though!?”

Tora’s rage was unsatisfied. “That’s why I said don’t shoot, you shitty amateur!” He said and glared at Rabito.

“Sh-shut up.”

Rabito was definitely not specialized at shooting.

Rather he was just bad. While he had exceptional, abnormal strength and a sense for upfront combat, he was absolutely hopeless with guns. Even though

his father and mother, and his grandfather and his grandmother were all gun experts. Although he was born to a lineage of bounty hunters for some reason only he did not have any talent for shooting. Even his uncle Wyatt had warned him countless times to not use a gun.

For some reason he always hit something different than what he was aiming at. And that was one reason he was called someone “with the right hand of the devil.” And unfortunately this time as well the bullet Rabito shot did not hit the targeted woman. Instead Tora had received the damage. Or rather the woman was waiting for Rabito’s attack and made distance from him. It did not change of him being saved out of a tight situation. The result was not alright.

“Actually, even though I saved you you’re not going to give me any thanks?”

After Rabito pouted,

“I say this often,” Tora sighed and picked up his fallen hat. He said in disdain while putting on the cowboy hat with a burn mark on its flange onto his head. “More than saving me you almost killed me.”

Rabito spat back in annoyance. “You piss me off as always. You should be glad I didn’t aim at you.”

At that Tora pointed at the woman with his thumb. “If you did maybe you’d actually hit the right person.”

He could not let that go. Rabito drew near Tora and spat back at his face. “What’s that? You treating me like I’m an idiot?”

“What’s wrong with treating an idiot as an idiot?”

Tora snorted. And then he shrugged his shoulders in exasperation.

“More importantly why is it that every single time you get in my way?”

He could not let that go either. The one getting in his way was him. He was pissed.

“Haa? Who is getting in whose way again?” Unyielding Rabito raised his voice looking down at the other in a slightly lower stance. “How about you try and say that again, you indigent.”

“Shut up you gorilla rabbit! Shut the hell up!”

The next moment Tora threw a first. It splendidly hit Rabito's right cheek, and he cried out, "fubeh."

"That hurt! You threw another punch at me, huh!" Rabito grasped his cheek and glared at Tora. "And this is why you're a former delinquent! Your bad upbringing is showing!"

"I don't you to be told that by a pampered selfish kid like you! You spoiled rich gorilla!"

"What did you say!? You got guts to say that for being an uneducated junior high graduate!!"

"You saying a stupid university student from a stupid private university is so great!? Aahh!?"

Rabito threw the punch this time.

Rabito had abnormal strength as he appeared. With just one punch he had plenty of times he completely knocked out his opponents. And that was also another reason he was called someone "with the right hand of the devil." No matter how much he loathed Torakichi Nishino, if he gave a serious punch the other's neck may break, so he generally holds back. Just a little bit.

Tora's body stumbled from the force of being hit in the cheek. However, he did not collapse. Naturally since this man used to be a former delinquent out of a gang he was used to fighting. His physical strength was not poor either. He managed to regain his footing and after wiping the blood dripping from his nose with the back of his hand Tora held up his fists.

"Damn, you punched me, you bastard!"

Tora also had a fairly tall figure and had good physique, but he was no match against Rabito. However, he came right at a larger opponent than him without faltering. He was such a nasty guy.

Tora's fist sunk into his body, and Rabito gave a small groan. Even for a tough guy like him he got a little dizzy.

"Weren't you the one who punched first?!"

It did not matter who threw it first. Rabito once again punched Tora.

It was the same for the other. When he got punched he could only punch back. The chest, the stomach, the solar plexus, and the face. Without either retreating a step away, the simple brawl and bickering continued on.

“You unrefined Hanshin fan!!”

“You Giants fan with no integrity!!”

“What was that!!”

“I’ll kill you!!”

There was a dull sound. Their fists hit each other’s cheeks – and still keeping the close encounter the two’s movements came to a halt.

“.....Hey.”

In the dead silent abandoned building Rabito suddenly realized. That in this area there was only the two of them: Rabito and Tora.

“Where’s the bounty?”

There was no one here. At some point that woman disappeared. Tora returned to himself and quickly looked around the area. And then,

“.....Damn it, they got away.”

He said in a whisper and held his head.

バッティング

Chapter 5

5章



Chapter 5: Batting

Lin and Banba had decided to do some bounty hunting since their luggage had been stolen at the batting center, but they never expected to actually end up butting heads with a real bounty hunter.

They came to an abandoned warehouse to seize a man with a 300,000 yen bounty named Kasaoka, but a man calling himself a bounty hunter had appeared. It was a young man in a cowboy getup. When Lin had cornered the man and tried to add the finishing blow, another man made a sudden appearance. He was a large-built man wearing priest clothes, and his target also seemed to be Kasaoka's bounty.

The minister guy had addressed the cowboy one with a mimicry of carelessness, completely not reading the situation. It seemed they were acquaintances. *So did he come to save his friend?* Lin wondered.

– However, it was not.

“And this is why you’re a former delinquent! Your bad upbringing is showing!”

“I don’t you to be told that by a pampered selfish kid like you! You spoiled rich gorilla!”

“What did you say!? You got guts to say that for being an uneducated junior high graduate!!”

“You saying a stupid university student from a stupid private university is so great!? Aahh!?”

The cowboy and the minister started to bicker. They approached each other right to their face and while cussing out the other their argument steadily got more intense.

In the end it had evolved to a fist-fight.

“You unrefined Hanshin fan!!”

“You Giants fan with no integrity!!”

It appeared both of them had completely forgotten of Lin and Banba. They were only considered with each other.

– What's up with these two. Are they stupid?

Lin watched the fight between the priest and the cowboy dumbfounded.

And then,

"Lin-chan, Lin-chan."

Banba motioned to him in a low voice from behind the drum can. He then pointed to the exit. It was the signal for 'let's run while we have the chance.'

They had accomplished their goal in capturing the bounty. There was no further purpose to stay in this place longer than necessary, and they did not need to participate in these cosplayers' fight.

As not to be noticed by the two decking it out, they stealthily sneaked out of the abandoned building with the bounty in tow. As they were walking through the city of Ikebukuro,

"Just who in the world were they.....?"

Lin questioned recalling the previous pair.

From the looks of it they were acquaintances but not friends. I guess it's something like that. They could be rivals in their trade. Actually now thinking about it, he recalls. Banba and I used to butt heads at work, and we had even fought like that before. That brings back memories.

"Well, whatever."

Banba was in high spirits.

"He got ourselves a bounty. So let's hurry up an' get our pay and go for some tonkotsu ramen."

"And like I said, why tonkotsu ramen? I'll decline."

Lin objected Banba's attempt at suggesting his own preferred food.

"We came all this way, so let's eat something more Tokyo-like."

"Like shoyu ramen?"

"Something else besides ramen."

No matter how much they disputed over this here without money they could not be able to receive food. Their first priority was to receive their payment.

Lin took out his smartphone and opened up the web browser.

"Well first let's call up these guys at this NPB place."

.....*I got it bad.*

Tora and Rabito walked alongside each other grudgingly while thinking that to themselves. They had no choice but to head back to Wyatt's shop empty-handed because they lost their bounty.

"You must be type-B." Tora glared at Rabito on the side and said to him. "And you're an only child right? You're selfish and you're inconsiderate."

"What's with that? Can you not take liberty in labeling me like that? Besides, that's rude to all the only children in this country that are type B. Apologize."

Even while walking through downtown Shinjuku the two's bickering was still going on.

"I despise people who judge someone based off their blood type and if they have siblings or not." Rabito stated to Tora, sparing him a glance. "It's a standard fact a person's personality is not determined by blood but by how they're raised by their parents."

Tora snorted. "Then you having been pampered to your whole life must make you have the worst personality."

"I don't want to be told that by you: a former delinquent and juvenile scum that had to go to a detention center."

"I've never been to a detention center. Don't make up a person's past."

"I think it's so badly fitting a parent would give their child the name 'Torakichi' though."

At that moment veins appeared in Tora's face.

"You just dared to insult my mother, didn't you?!" He bore his teeth and drew close to Rabito. "And then to insult even my name! Apologize for all the

Torakichis in the country!"

"They isn't anyone else but you with that stupid, odd name!"

"There may be! Don't you decide if that's the case!"

The two arrived at the western bar Dodge City.

As the two passed through the swinging door while hollering at each other the owner was there with an exasperated expression. ".....You guys are rambunctious as ever. I heard your voices all the way from here."

"Wyatt!"

"Uncle!"

"Listen!"

"He made me lose it!"

The two spoke up at the same time and pointed at each other.

"Because of this filthy rich gorilla -"

"Because of this poor hoodlum -"

"I got it already. Anyway calm down, you two."

Wyatt cut off the other two and pressed further.

"We have a guest over. So will you hush up?"

".....A guest?"

Tora and Rabito tilted their head in wonder.

When they looked more attentively there was a young man sitting at the table facing Wyatt. He was a man with a blond mushroom-shaped head and a vague impudent expression that gave off an audacious presence.

After he looked between Rabito and Tora he smiled a toothy grin. "I heard that two interesting newcomers joined, but they really are quite something."

"Aren't they?" After smiling wryly back, Wyatt introduced the visitor to the two. "This is Enokida. He's an informant I've known for a long time."

Tora took off his hat and gave his salutations. "I'm Torakichi Nishino. Nice to

meet you.”

“Nice to meet you. Your oldest younger brother Tiger-kun entered his third year in middle school, right? Has it been decided which high school he’ll go to?”

“Wha-”

He widened his eyes. Why does he know?

Tora glared at Wyatt suspecting he mentioned it to him, but Wyatt shook his head side to side. “Enokida specializes in hacking.”

Enokida smiled while typing on his laptop, “as long as I know the name I can easily pry into personal information.”

At that,

“Hey listen,”

Rabito’s eyes lit up, and he bent forward.

“How much have you looked into me?”

After Enokida glanced at his laptop screen,

“Rabito Westwood-kun. I see you got your black hair from you Japanese mother and are a Giants fan due to her influence. It seems you bought a period pass to Tokyo Dome with the black card you received from your parents.”

“Whooooa.” Rabito’s eyes widened, and he raised his voice. “You’re amazing. That’s an informant for you.”

“– By the way.”

Wyatt looked back at the two and changed the topic.

“What’s up with you two? Both of you are hurt. What on earth did you do? What about the bounty?”

Tora spoke first when asked. “Someone else got there first.”

“Someone else?”

“Yeah. When I went to the abandoned building Shinta Kasaoka was hiding up in there was a group of two people. They took my prey.”

“What were they like?”

“One was a man crossdressing as a woman.”

“Eh? That woman was a man?” Rabito was shocked. “You serious. He was crossdressing? I didn’t notice at all.”

“.....Crossdressing?” Enokida responded to Tora’s words.

“What’s wrong?”

When Wyatt asked Enokida just shook his head. “No, it’s nothing.”

“The other was a tall man and had a thick accent. I think it was a dialect from the Kyushu region. Like Hakata dialect or something.”

“.....Hakata dialect?” Enokida responded again.

“What’s this. Do these two sound familiar to you?”

“No, not at all.” Enokida denied and asked Wyatt in turn. “Do you know them?”

“I’ve never heard of a bunch like that. At least not anyone in our group (NPB).”

“Probably.” Tora nodded in agreement. They were certainly new faces for him. “They could have been amateurs from another region.”

It was then.

“Ahh! I just remembered!”

Rabito sounded yelled out.

“.....Just shut you gorilla.”

Ignoring the three raising eyebrows at him dubiously Rabito pulled out a large luggage from the counter. It was a black traveling bag. He took out a wallet from the inside pocket and fished inside it for its contents.

“This guy. It is this guy!”

What Rabito held up was the driver’s license that was in the wallet. The photo was the exact same as the man who spoke Hakata dialect at that place.

Tora nodded as well, “Yeah, that’s him. There’s no doubt about it.”

“I had thought I’ve seen that guy’s face somewhere before.”

"His name is Zenji Banba, and his address is Hakata Ward, Fukuoka City.So he really is an outsider."

".....Say."

Enokida spoke up suddenly.

"Could I take this luggage off your hands?"

Wyatt nodded. "I don't really mind, but what are you planning to do with it?"

"I'm going to give it back to its owner. This address is close to where I'm staying at."

"Well that'd be a great help if you could do that for us," Wyatt frowned in suspicion. ".....but were you always this kind of a person?"

A man picked up the call when they called the number listed for the NPB. "We got the bounty," when Lin reported that to them the other man gave them a time and place for the exchange. They were ordered to bring the man to the second floor of the parking structure in thirty minutes.

As instructed Lin and Banba went to the designated parking garage with Shinta Kasaoka.

The other man was already waiting for them. He was slim and wearing black clothes, but since he was wearing a mask to hide his face they could not tell further details. He was a very suspicious man.

"It is you guys who contacted us right?"

The man addressed them upon spotting Lin and Banba.

"Yeah, it is."

Lin nodded and pointed to the captured Kasaoka with his chin. "This is the guy you've been looking for, right?"

Kasaoka was still unconscious. Banba had carried him all the way here with his limbs bound. He was currently laid down at their feet.

After confirming the bounty's face the man nodded. "Yes, it is. There is no mistake."

The man held a paper bag.

"This here is your reward."

He held the bag open as they peered inside of it. They could see from afar that bills were inside. There was certainly 300,000 yen in there.

They finished their exchange.

After handing over Kasaoka and receiving the paper bag two other men appeared. They picked up Kasaoka's body and put him into the trunk of the car parked nearby. They had finished their task. The men left them behind and got into the car.

After the car had left Lin raised his voice in excitement. "We finally got money."

Who knew making 300,000 yen would be so much effort. Jobs away from their home really are too much work.

"I'm starving. Let's go and eat right away, Banba."

He addressed him, but there was no response. "....."

He turned around and asked him with his head tilted to the side. "Banba? What's wrong?"

Banba was focused on the contents in the paper bag.

After a moment he called his name in a tightened voice.

".....Lin-chan."

"What is it?"

When Lin asked back Banba whispered with dead eyes with no light in them.

".....These here are fake."

The mysterious group of two Tora and Rabito ran into at the abandoned building – the man with the Hakata accent and the man crossdressing as a woman.

Enokida had lied that he did not know them, but he had realized it was those two right away. No matter how he thought it it had to be Banba and Lin. So they came to Tokyo as well. He vaguely suspected it. He was unsure of the reason why they came so quickly though.

Even so just what sort of connection does the man they were looking for have?

"They must have been quite skilled." Wyatt slipped a wry smile while he was treating the wound on Tora's face. "For them to hurt you this much."

"No," Tora shook his head at Wyatt's words and pointed with his chin to the large man sitting next to him. "This is from that stupid rabbit guy. Seriously, it's so bothersome."

"I could say the same." Rabito says with a pout while wiping off the blood at the corner of his lips with his thumb. "Because of you my handsome face is ruined."

".....So you guys fought again."

Wyatt sighed.

Their fighting seemed to be an everyday occurrence from what he could tell from that expression.

"Rabi, you had my gun again, didn't you? I've told you countless times to not use a gun."

Rabito answered while smirking ungracefully to Wyatt's scolding, "it was just self-defense."

"What 'self-defense.' He just fired willy-nilly."

Tora scowled and tattledaled to Wyatt.

"He was just as skillful as ever. Please, Wyatt. Please don't ever let this hopeless idiot wield a gun again. Because of this idiot I have to get a new hat. My expenses this month are piled up as it is."

"Stop your pitiful crying. I can easily buy a hat. A brand a pauper like you can't get your hands on."

"That'd be with your parents money anyway. Quite acting like you're so great."

Among the high tense, near explosive situation, "Tora, Rabi," Wyatt chimed up.

“Give it up already. Or I’ll confiscate your license.”

The two were bounty hunters employed under the NPB. If they were deprived of their license issued by the organization they would lose the ability to receive work.

It seemed Wyatt’s threat worked. The two shut their mouths and looked away from each other.

Enokida whispered in a murmur while watching the two trying to behave, “.....This brings back memories of two certain someones.”

He recalled the past while gulping down his glass. Those two fought like this in the past before too. It was especially bad during baseball practices or games. They bickered back and forth calling each other ‘idiot’ or ‘hopeless.’

While he felt the nostalgia, he received a call from those two. He hit the accept call button and pressed the device to his ear. “Hello?”

[– Hey, mushroom.]

Lin’s voice sounded irritated.

[We need you to look up something; it’s urgent.]

Enokida frowned at the forced tone. “What happened?”

When he asked, [It’ll take a long time to explain.] Lin started off before continuing. [The truth is, we.....we’re in Tokyo right now.]

“Hmm, is that so?” He did not say that he already knew.

[And we really need money right now.]

Lin did not say the reason why they needed money, but he already had an idea as to why.

[We thought of getting money by catching a bounty listed on Undergroundjobs.com.]

“And that was what Shinta Kasaoka was for?”

[That’s right.] Lin verified and continued on. [So we caught him and handed him over to the client.....but the money we received was fake.]

"I see." Enokida gave a faint smile. "So you guys were put to work for free?"

[We can't let this go. We're professional killers after all.]

How dare they look down on us, Lin spat out. He seemed to have taken great offense to this.

"So you want me to locate their location so you can have them pay you for real?"

[Thank you for getting to the point.]

After they dropped the call he received an e-mail from Lin right away. There was no text in it except for just the URL. The link was to the page Undergroundjobs.com Tokyo Version. The mentioned post appeared to still be on there.

'For those who catch this man we will pay a bounty of three hundred thousand yen. The people to hand him over to is at the NPB.'

— That is what was written. The given phone number is probably a prepaid, throw away device.

The NPB did not put up bounties on a place like this. In other words someone was using the NPB's name and set up Lin and Banba.

The internet was Enokida's home (stronghold). It was easy work for a hacker like him to find the one who posted the request on the site with the basic technique of identifying the IP address. As long as they were not specialists there should be no concern in receiving a counter attack.

The edges of Enokida's mouth curved upward, "now then, shall we begin?" And like playing the piano his ten fingers danced over the keyboard.

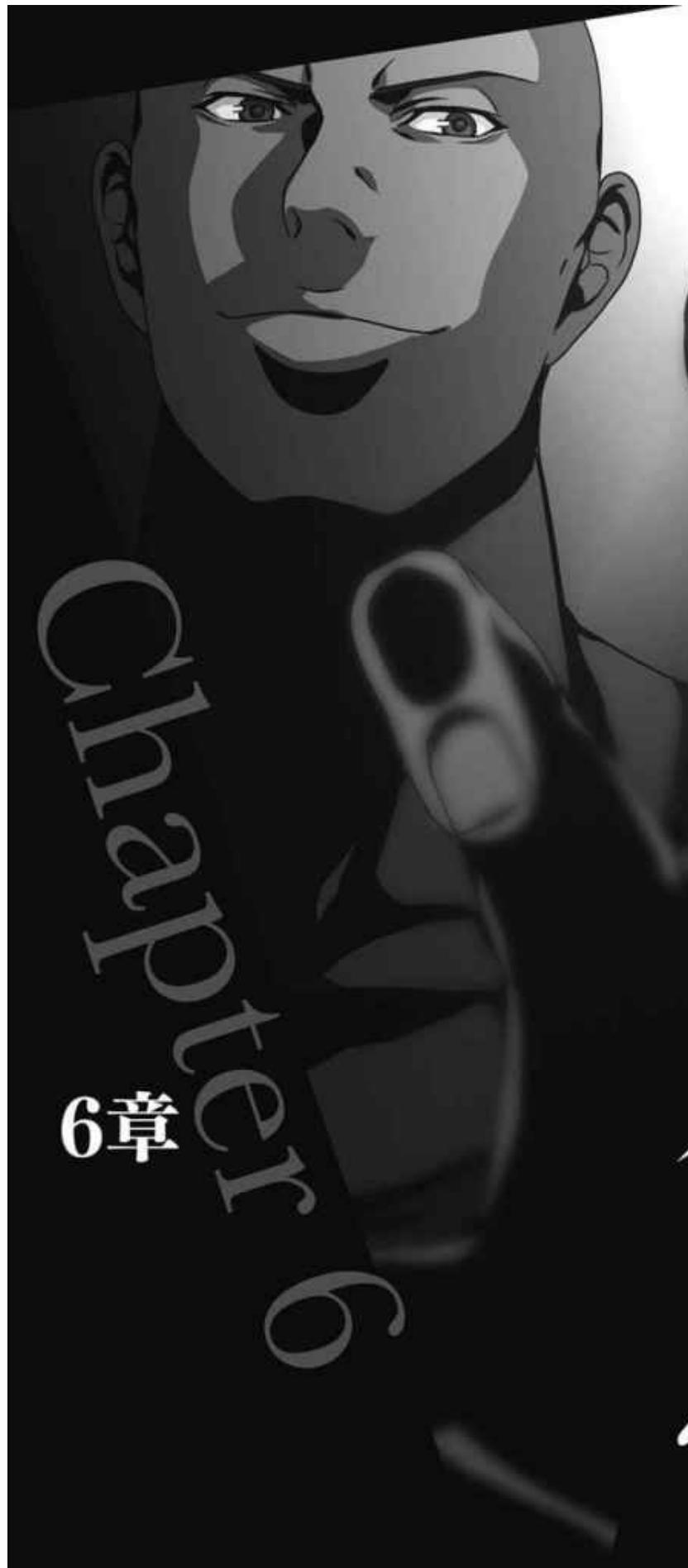
Translation Notes:

1. So the title of this chapter can be translated as "batting" or "butting." It may be a borrowed word, but バッティング is the phonetics to both of these words. It is likely the title refers to both terms.

幹部候補を九枚つた男？

Chapter 6

6章



Chapter 6: The Man Who Killed the Executive Candidate?

After the two bounty hunters handed over Shinta Kasaoka, Wilson then gave them the bag with fake bills in it. All of it was in according to his superior, John Wayne's orders. He put Kasaoka into the trunk of the vehicle and headed back to the company right away before the two noticed the money was fake.

Kasaoka seemed to be completely emaciated. It could not be helped. In these past few days he had been cashed down by complete strangers relentlessly. Without any time to relax he could not take a rest. He certainly seemed John Wayne's plan to torment the traitor psychologically had succeeded.

Once he arrived at the Wild Bunch company Wilson and his subordinates carried Kasaoka to the multipurpose room.

There, a large wooden cross was set up. This must also be John's doing. *What influence did he get from some movie now?* Though curious Wilson fastened Kasaoka to the cross, similar to how Christ was put on one.

John was ecstatic.

"I wanted to see you, Kasaokaa."

The gulping sound from Kasaoka could be heard when he was given a vicious smile from John. The color of fear anticipating what he planned to do with him shone in his eyes.

John was pleased to see that expression on Kasaoka's face.

"Don't worry; I won't kill you right away."

He gave a dry laugh.

"I have a mountain load of things I need you to tell me after all."

John said before ordering to his subordinate, "bring him in."

The person who appeared shortly after was a foreigner with a large build. He had tan skin and tattoos on both of his burly arms. From his facial features he

was probably a native from Central or South America. The skin-head man's aggressive look made it clear he was not a man of an honest disposition but a person from the underground.

"He is a professional torturer."

After John easily introduced him to the man, he gave a slight bow to the foreigner.

"Now then, sir. If you may."

José Martinez was a Dominican. And he had many secrets about him. The first being that his sexuality was homosexuality. And other being that his occupation was as a torturer.

Martinez belonged to the grass-lot baseball team, the Hakata Tonkotsu Ramens, as their one of a kind powerful slugger and their fourth batter in running. Naturally he also had come to participate in the Tokyo away series.

He hardly had any opportunities to go to Tokyo when working in Fukuoka. He frequently considered going to Shinjuku in the past. He wanted to go drink at the gay bar Ni-Chome there and enjoy a whole evening with others who have the same sexuality as him.

And so Martinez headed to the capitol a few days before the practice match. But even though he was excited to fully enjoy sightseeing he had received an e-mail from a long-term client in his work.

'There is an acquaintance of mine in Tokyo who is looking for a torturer, so do you mind going?'

What a coincidence. But what poor timing.

Even though I had plans to enjoy the night fever at the foremost gay town in Tokyo. Martinez clasped a hand to his head.

But since it was a request from a close client of his he could not decline. I guess I can do the job and save up for traveling expenses next time. Martinez decided to take it head on.

The client met him at the Shinjuku Station. Their destination was in Ikebukuro.

After weaving through alleyways they finally arrived at their destination. It was a three-story office building, and Martinez was shown to one of the rooms on the basement floor.

The target of torture was a man named Kasaoka, and he was already there. For some reason there was a cross set up in the center of the room.

“Now then, sir. If you may.”

“– I finished.”

The torturer informed Wilson waiting outside of the room. He appeared to be a natural-born foreigner, but he was fluent in Japanese.

The torture session did not even take an hour.

Kasaoka, having been driven to the breaking point psychologically, probably gave up trying to endure against the intense pain inflicted upon him. He may have told all the details indiscreetly, shaken up by the intimidating appearance of the torturer. He did appear to have been knocked around though as his whole body was bloody. Right now he was limp and still hanging on the cross in the center of the multipurpose room. He was barely breathing.

“Thank you for your work.”

Wilson poured tea for him and brought it to the multipurpose room. “Here you go,” he handed it over to the torturer.

However he did not place it to his lips.

“And how did it go?”

When Wilson asked for the course of events,

“Did you *not kill* the Awakusu executive candidate?”

The torturer asked back in return.

Wilson fell silent at the question.

“Well, that’s fine. I don’t want to poke my nose where it doesn’t belong. My well-being is important to me after all.” The torturer smiled at him. He did not appear to want to press into the matter.

They actually did not kill the Awakusu executive candidate. In that duel John

purposefully made his shot avoiding any vitals.

– Why?

The reason was simple. If they killed him they would have had to spend money to dispose of the body. However if they let him live money could be made from people. So they decided against killing him, and instead sent the man overseas through the underground route.

It was human trafficking so to speak. John had lied to his client and took the reward deceptively. This was just one of this man's makeshift means.

“ – At any rate.”

Torturer returned to the main topic. He first stated that he did not know the full scenario before pressing on.

“This guy said he leaked information that the Wild Bunch company kidnapped that executive candidate to Murder Inc. And how he may have been killed. Ahh, what did he say? A dual? Well it was something like that that he reported in detail about John playing with the guy's life.”

Wilson felt irritated again recalling the farce that occurred here a week before the last one.

“Murder Inc. has close ties with the Medeii Group. And the subordinate candidate under the Awakusu group that is affiliated with them has been missing since the week before last. And they have been desperate to get their hands on that information on him. And this guy tipped us off to them. The employees who work here with all the information on them. It seems like the details of the case with the executive candidate has already reached the Awakusu group through Murder Inc. Even for a company like them they probably wanted to have their patron in their debt.”

Naturally the Awakusu group could not just stay silent over this.

“.....And the Awakusu's course of action?” Wilson inquired.

“They want to capture all the persons involved with the murder of the executive candidate and have them talk. But they also don't have the time for that. Seems they're in a bit of disarray at the moment.” The torturer carried on.

"So the Awakusu group handed that over to the NPB."

Wilson pondered over the mention of the NPB. He knew of them.

"I don't know the details on them, but I guess they're a bounty hunting organization."

"Yes, more or less." He agreed ambiguously.

"The Awakusu group went through with them and put bounties on all of your guys' heads."

Wilson felt dizzy.

The torture of the man Kasaoka was so simple it was a let-down. He just hurt him a little and he got 50,000 yen for it. It was relatively well paid work.

The client was a suspicious company called the Wild Bunch Group, but they gave proper payment for his work.

"We'll pay 10,000 yen more for you not to talk about it elsewhere." So he was told, but Martinez refused, "don't need it." Receiving excessive money is the basis of trouble.

The job finished quickly, so he still had time to go out drinking. Martinez decided to head back to Shinjuku.

As he was about to though,

" – Ah?"

He came to a stop just as he left the Wild Bunch company's office.

".....Where am I?"

There was no issue coming here by car, but now that he had to go back by himself he was unsure of which road to take.

"This sucks."

Martinez grimaced while wiping a hand past his cleanly shaved head.

Where am I right now?

He could look up his current location using a map app, but he was bad using it. He did not know how to use those features.

“.....That’s right.”

A thought suddenly struck him; he had a friend who specializes in that.

The image of the mushroom head man with upturned eyes appearing in his mind, Martinez immediately made the call.

Translation Notes:

Commonly known as just Ni-Chome, it is well known as a “gay quarter” in east Shinjuku. It’s a very iconic area with lots of night clubs and bars for heterosexuals and homosexuals alike, but it’s especially received as the hub for the gay subculture in the Tokyo area.

ワイルドバンチ
一味

WILD BUNCH



Chapter 7

Chapter 7: WANTED: The Wild Bunch Group

As soon as Enokida started researching the group up he confirmed the access point of the post was from within Ikebukuro. The address was Ikebukuro 2 Choume 60 Banchi, the first floor of a three story building. The computer terminal set up in there was where the post pretending to be the NPB was.

He attached the address and a map in an e-mail and sent it to Lin.

Soon after he received a reply from him. [Do you know a place that lends weapons around this area?] It said. Banba was probably unarmed, so they thought he would need a weapon when they infiltrate the enemy's hideout.

“ – Hey, Wyatt.”

Enokida spoke to Wyatt as he was working in front of the wall. He was just about to put up a bounty for the Wild Bunch Company.

“An acquaintance of mine is searching for a shop that can supply them with weapons around Ikebukuro. Do you know any places?” Thinking a local would know more about the area Enokida decided to ask him. “They don’t seem to have money, so it’d be more ideal if they could borrow them for free. Or pay later.”

Hm, Wyatt nodded and then provided an answer. “Then I think they should go to Hugo’s place.”

“Hugo?”

“He is a Mexican weapon sales guy. He has a shop in Ikebukuro. If you have them give my name he’ll help them out.”

He wrote down the address of the store Wyatt had told him and sent it to Lin. Soon after he received a call. He hit the button to accept the call. “Hello?”

He thought it was Lin but it was not.

[– Enokida, it’s me.]

The caller was his teammate José Martinez.

[I need your help.]

“What’s wrong?”

[Please hack into my cell phone.]

“What?” Enokida tilted his head to the side. “Did you lose it or something?”

[No,] Martinez laughed bitterly. [Although I should be old enough to know better, I got myself lost.]

“.....Ha?”

[I don’t know where I am. And I can’t get a taxi.]

“What were you doing?”

[Just please find my current location with your hacking skills and lead me to the nearest train station. Like tell me ‘now turn left in another 30 meters’ or something.]

“I’m not a car navigation system.”

Despite telling him this, Enokida reluctantly agreed to it.

“I’ll look it up now, so don’t move.”

Enokida got onto his laptop and started to trace the call. Not even a few minutes later and the results came in. Martinez’s current location was displayed on a map on his screen. And somehow he was also not in Fukuoka but Tokyo. So he came ahead of time.

The address of where he was at was Ikebukuro 2 Chome 60 Banchi – Enokida came to a realization as he read silently.

“This place is -”

He muttered unconsciously.

There was no mistake. It was the exact same address as the IP address of that post. This was far past a mere coincidence.

“.....Ah, head to the right. And turn left at the second corner ahead.”

[Ohh, alright.]

Martinez seemed to have started walking as the mark on the map began to move as well.

“ – By the way.” Enokida asked him while providing navigation. “Maru-san, why are you in Ikebukuro?”

[Ahh, it was for work. I was asked to torture someone.]

“By whom?”

[A company called the Wild Bunch.]

“!”

– The Wild Bunch.

He recalled that name.

Quickly looking up Enokida spotted the bulletin post. He saw the wanted poster Wyatt just put up: WANTED The Wild Bunch Group. Rabito and Tora were bickering over something as he looked at the poster. These two would likely dispute over which team to go for.

The bounty price for the leader of the group and the head of the Wild Bunch Company, John Wayne's, is 1,000,000 yen. For his right-hand man Wilson and the eight subordinates it is 200,000 yen. The other team underlings are 40,000 yen each. The total bounty for them is 3,000,000.

“.....M-hm.” Enokida grins. This looks like it will be a good source of revenue.
“Tell me the whole thing.”

Once he heard what Martinez had to say in regards to his job, he had a general idea of what was going on from Banba and Lin's actions. Coincidentally the person Martinez tortured was the same man Banba and Lin had captured.

Lin and Banba encountered the novice bounty hunters from Dodge City in the middle of capturing the man. And the nefarious people who did not pay up to Lin and Banba were also the ones who hired Martinez, the Wild Bunch Group. And they should be trying to infiltrate their base soon.

At the same time, Tora and Rabito seemed to be looking at the Wild Bunch Company as well. At this rate if they go they would end up battling with Lin and Banba again.

“.....Now then, what to do.”

In contrast to his conflicted statement Enokida had a smile on his face.

“ – Say, Maru-san.”

[What is it?]

“In exchange for me telling you the way back I have a favor for you to do.”

[Oh, that's alright. Tell me.]

He glanced around the facility briefly, “I can't say it here. I'll send you an e-mail later.”

After he told Martinez the last of the directions Enokida dropped the call.

He had Enokida locate the cowards that tricked them and had them work for free. All that was left was to infiltrate their hideout, catch the culprits and have them pay up, but they had one problem. Banba did not have a weapon.

They came to Tokyo for baseball in the first place. They did not consider they would end up facing against an underground organization. Unlike Lin who had already been walking around with his specialty knife pistol for self-defense, Banba's weapon, a Japanese sword, was at their home in Fukuoka. The only object that could be used as a weapon is his beloved baseball bat, but he despised hurting anyone with his sacred baseball equipment. And so they had to be provided with a weapon from somewhere.

He asked Enokida to look into it and he mentioned a weapons shop in Ikebukuro. *Really he's a guy who knows everything.*

According to the message there is an acquaintance of Enokida's called Wyatt, and it was that friend of Wyatt's who ran the smuggled goods store.

Lin and Banba decided to head over and check the place out. When they opened the heavy doors on the third floor of the tenant building in Ikebukuro, they heard joyous, Latin music was playing. The store was not particularly spacious, and the space was cluttered. There were various furnishings and miscellaneous goods set up in disarray.

“¡Hola!”

A suspicious looking foreign man greeted them.

He was likely the owner of this store. After he examined Lin and Banba's faces he told them, "You're new faces. Nice meeting you. Mucho gusto," and held out his hand to them.

Hesitantly they shook his hand.

"My name is Hugo. Spelled H.U.G.O. You don't pronounce the H." The man introduced himself.

This was the second time hearing broken Japanese. Lin thought to himself. He recalled the black man they encountered at the sushi restaurant.

The owner of this store was also an unusual foreigner. He was in a sombrero hat and poncho and had strong facial features. And then he had a Spanish name – in all probability he was likely Mexican.

"We came under Wyatt's referral."

When Lin told him this Hugo clasped his hands together.

"Ohh, the sheriff? Sí, sí."

He did not know anything about a sheriff, but he seemed to have understood. "I give you a service, amigo. Which do you want?" Hugo asked Lin.

Banba answered him in his place. "We're lookin' for a Japanese sword."

"Japanese sword?"

At that moment Hugo's expression lighted up.

"Hugo has got a nice katana."

After he told them that he headed further inside the store. After a while Hugo returned holding a black case.

"How is this?"

In the case was a magnificent Japanese sword. It looks like a high priced item from one glance at it, so Lin quickly added. "Actually, we don't have money."

Banba next to him desperately tried to tell him in English, "no money, no money." Though Hugo only nodded multiple times, "sí, sí."

"It's fine." Hugo told them with a smile. "If you're amigo of Wyatt, I give for free. Take it. This katana is amazing. Was made by skilled blacksmith."

"Really?"

"It is an article he poured his heart into and forged when he held himself up in a mountain for three years and washed his mind and body against the waves each day."

".....That seems shady."

Half pressed to take it, Banba accepted the case.

Hugo gave them a thumbs up with his right hand and said to them as the two left in Spanish, "¡Hasta la vista, amigos!"

Banba had received a shady Japanese sword from a shady weapons dealer, but his expression was not cheerful. He appeared to be puzzled over something. He tilted his head in wonder with the case in hand. ".....I wonder if it's really alright to get to for free."

"Isn't it fine? You got something for free." Lin spurted out a laugh. "Especially since we don't have any money."

"Well, that's true." He whispered and dropped his gaze down to the case in his hand. "But to hand out a magnificent sword such as this.....Dontcha reckon' it's a bit fishy?"

Lin agreed with Banba's statement. *That's true. Maybe there is more to it than it appears*, he could not help but suspect. But they had no other means. They had to accept it.

"More than that, let's get going."

They finished their preparations. All that was left is to infiltrate the enemy base. Lin took out his smartphone and brought up the map.

"So it's 'bout ten minutes from here." Banba whispered while peeking over to look at the screen.

"Don't know who the hell they are, but we're getting our 300,000 yen." Lin gave a smirk, recalling the man's face. "We're coming for you."

In the western bar Dodge City, Wyatt was devoting himself to his work. He was bringing out alcohol and food for guests and managing the wanted posters they received from the NPB. He did not have time to rest.

Enokida also appeared to be working where he was at the end of the table, typing swiftly on his keyboard while gulping down his glass.

Tora and Rabito were sitting down facing each other on the other side of the table and were continuing their bickering.

“ – And for some reason you are the only one with no talent for shooting.” Tora told him while he was stitching up the hole in his hat with a needle and thread. “Even though you call yourself a bounty hunter.”

“But in place of that God has bestowed onto me these beautiful looks. Amen.” Rabito made the sign of the cross across his chest while still reclined back in his seat.

“What amen?” Tora snorted. He bit off the thread with his teeth and fixed his temporarily repaired hat on his head. “You fake priest.”

“And you’re not a native of Osaka. Even though you’re a Hanshin fan.”

“I especially despise guys who judge someone’s patronage team based on their birth place.”

“Don’t you copy me.”

After Rabito and Tora glared at each other, they turned away with a snort. They then both got up and headed towards the bulletin board.

“Now then, who should I go for next?”

He looked at the wanted posters on the wall, standing in front of Rabito.

“Hey, I can’t see. Move. And while you’re at it shrink down a bit.” His massive size at 193 centimeters easily pushed aside Tora. “It’s because you’re so massive that you’re in the way, you giant. You Giants fan.”

“That has nothing to do with me being a Giants fan.”

While the two fired insults at each other they carefully looked through the wanted posters on there.

Rabito's gaze landed on one paper among them.

".....The Wild Bunch Group?"

It was still new. It was just put up by Wyatt a few moments ago.

"Ahh, that." Wyatt spoke up. "That just came in. Seems the Awakusu Group put that bounty out for them."

"I see." Tora groaned. "That's the Awakusu Group for you. They pay the big bucks."

"All together they're 3,000,000? That's not bad."

Tora glared at the grinning Rabito. ".....Hey."

"What are you getting at? These guys are my prey."

"Haa? I spotted them first."

"You can't do it. You'll be rained down with bullets."

"And you'll be beaten to a pulp."

"I'll mention it for good measure," Wyatt frowned at Tora and Rabito beginning to fight again. "Wouldn't it be better if you two teamed up?"

He would be thankful if they did that.

Rabito was Wyatt's nephew, but he was also like his own son to him. And it was the same for Tora. Wyatt had been looking after him since he was a minor.

Wyatt was worried. He did not want them to head into the outlaw's den individually no matter the amount of the bounty.

Tora was skilled at shooting. Rabito was physically strong. If these two teamed up and helped each other out it would be reassuring on his part. They would have to split the pay, but then the number of enemies could be divided in half for them. Then he could send them to the battlefield with a little bit more relief.

Though they would not comprehend his parental love. Once they heard the words "team up" the two visibly made a disgusted look and raised their voices, "blegh."

“Don’t joke around, uncle.”

“No kidding. Give us a break, Wyatt.”

“But.” Wyatt drove into them. “No matter the amount it’ll be too much for one of you to capture twenty men.”

They had to bring all of them back alive. Naturally they would need help.

Rabito grimaced at Wyatt’s words. “That’s true.” Tora also admitted hesitantly, “what you say is right.”

One more push.

“ – Then how about this.” Wyatt suggested. “How about you compete instead of working together.”

“.....Compete?”

“That’s right. There are roughly twenty enemies. You’ll compete in numbers for how many you defeat.”

“That sounds great.” Rabito exclaimed excitingly. His smile was beaming.

“Let’s have a match, wild tiger-chan.”

Tora was also a man who hated to lose. There was no way he would say no here.

“Fine with me.”

The two looked each other in the eye. Their gazes clashed and sparks flew.

“Now that has been decided, let’s go infiltrate their hideout.”

Rabito turned around and addressed Enokida relaxing at the table. “Hey, you over there.”

Enokida lifted his face up from his laptop and tilted his head. “What is it?”

“You’re an informant, right?”

“Yeah, and?”

“You can look anything up?”

“Pretty much.”

“Alright then.” Rabito pointed to the group’s wanted poster with his thumb.

"Look up these guys' location."

"Why do you ask me? There's an excellent informant in Shinjuku. And he helps you two out, right?"

Why do you know that? Tora had that sort of shocked expression. And then he inclined his head in questioning. "Hm?Wait, you two? So I'm not the only one using that man -"

"Hey, hey. What's the meaning of this?" Rabito scowled. "I receive information from him too."

Tora and Rabito look at each other and raised their voices and the same time.
"Haa?"

"You too?! Stop copying me, you gorilla!"

"That's my line! Don't you copy me!"

It seemed the two did not know they both have used the same informant.

".....So that informant stayed quiet on purpose."

"No kidding. What the hell."

Tora and Rabito frowned in resentment. These two hardly get along to the point one would wonder if there was some connection to a previous life. These two realizing they used the same informant did not sit well with them at all. "I won't use that guy anymore," the two decided.

Rabito turned back to Enokida and said, "well that's it, so please look into it."

He clasped his hands in front of his place in pleading, *please*. At that the mushroom haired informant readily consented. "Well, I don't really care. I already know the hideout of the Wild Bunch anyway."

Rabito's eyes widened at Enokida's words. "You serious?"

"Hey, is that true?" Tora bent forward as well.

"A friend of mine said he has been to their office before."

"Tell us the place of that office. I'll cover the alcohol expenses from here free for you."

Wyatt frowned at Tora's statement. "Hey now, don't decide that on your own." He whispered to himself in his mind he would deduct it from his wages.

Enokida took out a note and wrote down the address to the hideout. "Alright, here you go," he said and handed it over to Tora.

Peeking over at the paper Rabito muttered, "Ikebukuro 2-Chome, huh."

"Let's get going." Tora urges on while fixing the hat on top of his head. "Hurry up and get ready."

"Will you follow directions?"

Rabito took out a gun from somewhere and counts the remaining bullets. Seeing that Tora warned him sharply. "Hey, leave the gun."

"Haa?" Rabito frowned. "Are you saying I should go in unarmed?"

"You got your stupid strength your so proud of, right? Bambino."

Rabito grinned at that, "Ahh, I guess that's right."

"You feel like you're going to lose to me, so you're saying that."

"No." Tora turned down with a harsh tone and pointed to the stitched up hole in his hat. "I'm saying I don't want to be shot."

"Well, whatever. I'll give you this much of a handicap, Trinity."

"What handicap. You're overconfident as usual."

Tora made an exasperated face and sighed.

"I'll break that nose you hold up so high today."

"Don't be jealous because you have a flat face, You pure Japanese."

"Shut it, you half-Japanese gorilla."

Seeing the two leave the bar while bickering, Enokida said sarcastically, "they sure are getting along well."

It only increased Wyatt's anxiety. ".....Will those two be alright?"

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8

Chapter

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池袋の大闘



Chapter 8: Continuation – Ikebukuro Duel

When he took a moment to think about it, it was clear right away.

He certainly found it odd. Murder Inc. was rather lenient when John Wayne established his independence. They did not interfere or try to meddle with John's plans but remained as a spectator. They were fine with it. Murder Inc. had already sent a spy into the inner workings of the Wild Bunch at that time. They could receive reports from their spy periodically and leave the Wild Bunch Company up to their own devices. If they had any utility value they would let them swim along undisturbed, and when they became a hindrance they would eliminate all of them. That was Murder Inc's objective.

“ – And what else?”

John Wayne pressed for a continuation to the conversation with a low pitch to his voice.

He was enjoying himself with a western film in his office as usual. He listened to Wilson's report while laying back on the black leather coach, facing the television. Wilson could not see his expression from where he stood, but he was able to read from his tone that he was displeased.

“Kasaoka leaked everything about the company.” Wilson informed him of what the torturer had told him. “The identities of the employees and the jobs we have taken. Everything.”

The beginning of it all was a few weeks prior. The Wild Bunch Company accepted an assassination task from the gang, Airan, which made enemies with the Awakusu Group. They wanted to eliminate a certain man who was an executive subordinate of the Awakusu Group because he was a hindrance to them.

They took careful precautions as to not be tracked and the company abducted the man. And they secretly disposed of him after his dual with John. The case on the matter should have been closed.

However, it resurfaced. Initially they discovered a spy among them and then learned recently that the whole deal with them since the beginning was leaked.

Murder Inc. had sent that information to the subsidiary group of the Medei Group they are patron to, the Awakusu Group. Naturally even for the Awakusu Group they would not forgive murdering an important member of theirs in such a ridiculous farce off the hook. They must have wanted to punish the one responsible for the man's murder as well as the individuals who requested them to do so.

Furthermore –

"The Awakusu Group seems to have put out bounties for us."

All the employees under the Wild Bunch Company were wanted men. According to the information Kasaoka slipped to them, they put out national bounties of the employees with their names and photos on them.

"A bounty huh. Not too shabby." John broke into a smile, likely imagining himself on a bounty poster. "How much do I have?"

"You have 1,000,000 yen."

"One million?" John was displeased. He bit off the cigar in his mouth and scowled. "My bounty is only that much? I'd like for them to revise that."

Who knew they would be pursued by the NPB bounty hunters after using their name to deceive bounty hunters. He felt this was karma.

"Won't it be only a matter of time until the bounty hunters sniff us out?"

Then they should hurry up and make a move. They should relocate their hideout, or perhaps they should escape overseas.

Wilson addressed this with a grave expression, but Wilson rejected it with, "and what's wrong with that?"

"They're bounty hunters. We're killers. Is there a need to be afraid of them?" John laughed while blowing his cigar. "They're spoiled punks who aren't used to taking a person's life."

"However -"

Wilson began to say, but in that moment –

“– President John!”

One of their subordinates dashed into the room with desperate expression.

“What is it? You’re so noisy.”

“The bounty hunters are coming their way to the company!”

Wilson’s eyes widened in surprise. *They’re already here? We were too late.* He knitted his brows.

“What are the numbers?” John asked him in a quiet voice.

“There are two.”

Hearing that from his subordinate John was disappointed. “What’s this? It’s just two of them?”

Upon learning there were only two coming John seemed to have gained some composure as well. He returned a faint smile.

“How about we beat them to it?”

John stood up from the sofa and thrust his beloved revolver pistols in his gun belt at his waist.

Ikebukuro 20-Chome 60-Ban. There quietly stood a three-story office building. The men who deceived them should be inside somewhere.

Looking up at the building Lin voiced to motivate himself, “alright, let’s go in.”

Banba nodded beside him. “Yeah.”

Lin took out his favorite knife pistol from his pocket and pressed the intercom on the first floor.

After a few moments, the unsociable voice of a man replied back, [– who is it?]

“Um, we’re the fellas from earlier.” Banba faced the microphone and answered him. “We’re here for the bounty.”

[– What!?] The man shouted in shock. [You guys are bounty hunters!?]

“.....Ah?” Lin tilted his head in confusion.

Their objective was the bounty, so they could not say they were not bounty hunters. Their main occupation were as killers, but right now it was different. And there was no need to reveal their true identities. Lin replied ambiguously. “Well, that’s how we got here.”

After waiting some time they heard the sound of the door unlocking. It probably meant they could enter.

After opening the door with caution and proceeding down the hallway they entered into a spacious room. It seemed to be a break room of sorts; it had a television and several sofas and coffee makers in it.

And there were men waiting for them. There were about ten of them. Each one had a hand gun or short sword as a weapon in their hand. They seemed to intend on fighting them here.

“Seems we’re being given quite the welcome.”

Lin looked at the men and cracked a joke.

One of the men spoke up.

“If you let yourselves get captured quietly there won’t be any casualties.”

They had their guns facing them, but they did not appear to have any intent in killing them. “You two have utility value.” He grinned.

“Utility value?”

“You can resist and be killed at this very spot, or you can be caught and be put to work overseas. Choose which you prefer.”

I see, Banba muttered. They planned to capture them and sell them overseas to make money. Lin shrugged his shoulders beside him. “I’d rather not go with human trafficking again.”

Banba and Lin looked at each other. For one moment their eyes meet – that was their sign.

The two moved at the same time. Banba headed to the right, and Lin headed to the left. They rushed at the enemies.

Banba whipped the case with the Japanese sword inside around and hit the

men on the head with it in front of him.

The men taken by surprise regain their composure, and as they began to attack him he took out the sword from the case. He did not draw it. He had no intention on killing them. He hit them with the hilt of the Japanese sword at vital parts of their body including their heads, solar plexus, and backs to make them lose consciousness. He targeted the men with guns first and then confronted the remaining men.

When he looked over to where Lin was at, there were several men fallen around him as well. He had taken them all down. He had managed to clean them up in sheer moments. "That was easy." Lin laughed.

The two headed out of the room. Ahead of another hallway they could see a staircase. It was divided to an upper floor and a lower floor.

"Let's split up and search." Lin suggested. "I'll head to the second floor. You go to the basement."

"Got it."

He watched Lin head up the stairs before heading down to the bottom floor, and in that moment he felt sudden killing intent from behind him. When he snapped back around there was a man standing at the end of the hallway. He was probably one of the men they defeated early and had regained consciousness and pursued after them.

"Die, you -"

The moment the man brandished his gun a large, black shadow flickered behind him. Whoever it was, they sneaked up on the man and hit him in the head.

"Ah-gah."

Unable to pull the trigger, the man lost consciousness once more and fell at that spot.

- Who was that just now.....?

A large built man slowly approached the awestruck Banba.

"Ah," Banba voices, seeing the familiar figure.

The dark-skinned, Latin American showed a toothy grin. "Hey, Banba."

"Mar-san!"

His sudden, foreign rescuer was his teammate José Martinez.

"Why are you here, Mar-san?"

Martinez explained to the confused Banba. "Enokida asked me to come here. He said you guys would be here, so go and help you out. He mentioned that there was going to be a lot of enemies and you'd need the extra hand."

"I see. That's Enokida-kun for you." Thanks to him he narrowly escaped death. Banba gave a broad smile and his thanks. "Thank you, Mar-san. You saved me."

Banba and Martinez headed down to the basement floor. Proceeding through the long hallway ahead they saw a room labeled 'multipurpose room.' The door was open. They turned the knob and walked inside.

There was something in the center of the room. It was a man. He was hanging on a cross. His face looked familiar to him.

".....Huh? Ain't this guy here," Banba instantly came to a realization. "I thought I saw his face before."

It was the wanted man Shinta Kasaoka whom they caught and handed over to the NPB. Kasaoka was bleeding and unconscious. He had several marks as though he had been tortured.

"Oh dear," Banba frowned, seeing the painful sight and whispered. "Who'd do somethin' so awful....."

"Me."

"Eh?"

He took a double take on what Martinez said when it happened. He received a call from his cell phone in his pocket. The device vibrated along with playing the intro to *Izayuke Wakataka Gundan*. Banba pressed the button to answer.
"Hello?"

[– Ahh, good. You picked up.]

He heard the voice of his teammate. Speaking of the devil.

"Enokida-kun."

[Are you by chance in the middle of something right now?]

"We're at the address you told us about. I met up with Mar-san."

[That's good to hear.] Enokida laughed. [There are a lot of dangerous people there right?]

"Yeah." Banba agreed. "They greeted us with no courtesy."

[The company you guys infiltrated is a killer contracting company called the Wild Bunch.]

"The Wild Bunch?"

[Yes.]

Enokida addressed the main topic.

[The truth is all the employees of the Wild Bunch have bounties put on them.]

"Bounties? How much?"

[All together they have 3,000,000 yen.]

Banba's eyes widened at Enokida's statement. ".....Is that true now?"

According to Enokida this group was an illegal organization calling themselves the small killer contracting company, the Wild Bunch. If they brought them all in alive they would be paid by the NPB.

They came here to take the 300,000 they were not paid for, but he had trouble believing that a price ten times that would fall before them.

Martinez peeked over at Banba's face once he dropped the call. "What did Enokida have to say?"

"If we bring these fellas here back we get money for them."

"Huh," Martinez raised his voice. "Then let's tie them up so they can't get away."

The two grabbed rope and hand cuffs left in the multipurpose room and headed upstairs. The men they defeated earlier were still all fallen on the ground. They bound them one at a time and tied their legs and hands together

so they could not escape.

“One, two, three, four -”

He counted them. There were twenty employees in the Wild Bunch Company. For each underling it was 40,000. All the people here would be 40,000 each at least.

The ones left were –

“.....Ah, that ain’t good.”

He suddenly remembered. The remaining members were probably facing Lin by now. He had faith in his partner’s strength, but it would be problematic if he carelessly killed them.

“I’m headin’ off to find Lin-chan!”

He had to tell Lin quickly.

“Mar-san, take care of the rest of ‘em!”

Banba left Martinez there and ran off.

At that moment he heard the sound of a gun go off from the upper floor.

John Wayne was calm. He could just be pretending to be calm, but at least to Wilson he looks like he was. He was counting on his boldness in this sort of situation.

John appointed orders to his employees. First, half of them would go down to the first floor and shoot down the bounty hunters. They should be able to settle this with just ten people, but by the one in a million chance they broke through the others would remain waiting in the president’s office.

Several minutes later a young woman surprisingly was the one to arrive to the office.

“ – Don’t move.”

John told the mouse that wandered into their company with a sharp voice. The men who had been in waiting surrounded the woman with guns pointing at her.

“No further, young lady.”

When John stated that the woman stopped where she was at. Looking around the area from her line of sight she probably could tell it was pointless to resist. The woman slowly raised both her hands with a knife in her right hand. Her weapon of choice was probably just that knife. She was reckless for infiltrating this place armed with just that.

"I'm not a woman." The guy spoke. He had a audacious attitude. "I only dress as a woman. Don't just assume by looking."

Wilson was shocked. *This guy is a man?* He looked at him and observed closely. His face looked familiar to him. *Actually this man, isn't he one of the guys they in the parking garage when they went and exchanged Kasaoka?*

"Do you have that much faith in your skill to barge your way in here by yourself?" John grinned while still holding his gun. "Or are you just an idiot?"

"Which do you think?" The cross-dresser man laughed.

John snorted.

"I don't hate idiots like you. So I'll give you a chance."

He then ordered one of his subordinates.

"Give this guy a gun."

The subordinate tossed him a revolver gun he was holding onto the floor as instructed. The silver weapon lied at the cross-dresser's feet.

"Dual with me."

John ordered.

This again? Wilson sighed in his mind.

".....Haa? Dual?"

The cross-dresser squinted and inclined his head to the side.

"That's right. If you win the dual, I'll let you leave."

John took out a pocket watch from his pocket and told him, "when the music box stops playing pick up this gun and shoot me. Alright?" And he opened the lid.

A cheerful tune began to play. At that moment three of the subordinates got onto the ground and started rolling.

– This is déjà vu.

The scene of the dual from a few weeks ago played again in Wilson's mind. The same event from that time was going to happen again in front of him.

He could easily predict how this was going to end. Like the last time they would stare at each other for a while. The two quick gunmen would face off with the ridiculous melody as the background music. One was John Wayne. The other was this cross-dressing man. The moment the music stopped the cross-dresser would bend down to try and pick up the gun. But by then John would have shot a fire from his revolver. Wilson imagined the trivial conclusion to this dual and prays for it to end quickly.

John's expression was composed. He even seemed to be enjoying this situation. His victory was a given. At least it should have been. However, something happened beyond their expectations.

The cross-dresser moved while the music was still playing. He turned the knife he was holding in his right hand around, placed his index finger on the guard of it and pulled it back. The next moment there was a gunshot. A bullet flew from the knife itself.

“Wha-”

– What was that just now!?

Wilson's eyes popped out of his head. The cross-dresser had shot John with his knife. Shocked from the scene, Wilson was taken aback, dumbfounded. It was the same for the other men standing by around them. All of them were dumbfounded into silence.

And so there became an opening. The bullet pierced John's stomach. In the moment John recoiled from the impact the cross-dresser closed the distance. After smacking the hand gun out of his hand, he kicked it far away and out of reach.

There was a thin, gunpowder smoke coming from the knife he held. *That wasn't just an ordinary knife?*

“ – I told you,” the man gave them a wide grin. “Don’t assume just by looking.”

Even with ten weaklings with guns surrounding him Lin did move. He was only in the range of one person. Besides, Banba was downstairs. Even by the chance he did get captured he would just be saved later.

But the man did not try to kill Lin or to bind him. For some reason or another he stated, “dual with me.” And furthermore three men started rolling on the ground.

He did not get it. Lin was dumbfounded as a strange melody played.

– A dual? That’s ridiculous.

Fortunately he still had his knife in his right hand. It was a Chinese knife-pistol. It looked like a knife, but in truth it was also a gun. It had bullets, but there was not much in a load so he could not shoot everyone here.

Then he had to go for the guy on top.

Lin immediately shot him. Once he closed the distance he moved around to his back side and pressed the tip of his knife to his throat.

“Y-you, you shoooooot!”

The boss yelled while putting pressure onto his wounded stomach.

“You cowaaard!”

“What are you talking about? You’re the coward.” Lin shrugged. *Is he really saying tossing the gun onto the floor is a fair dual?*

“All of you, drop you weapons. Raise your hands and line up facing the wall.”

Lin directed them, looking at all the subordinates.

“If you try and resist even a little I’ll slice open this guy’s throat.”

The boss ordered the bewildered subordinates, “do as he says!” All of them placed their guns onto the floor and raised their hands.

Lin had the boss as a hostage and eight unarmed men.

– This is a sudden role reversal.

Lin immediately brought up their main objective. "Now then, how about you pay up this time around?"

The boss exclaimed, "what are you talking about?" He did not appear to be playing dumb; he really did not seem to remember.

"The 300,000 you were supposed to pay up. You put that bounty on Kasaoka right? Yet you bastards gave us fake money. If you pay up there won't be any more harm done to you. And we'll leave quietly. I promise you that."

Once they get their money they had no further use from them.

"300,000 you say? Alright. I got it." The man pointed to his subordinate with his chin. "Hey, Wilson! Prepare the money!"

It was when the appointed subordinate began to move.

" – Lin-chan!"

Banba dived into the run, his face red.

"Sup." Lin replied with a cheerful tone. "You're late, Banba."

".....Thank goodness."

Banba was relieved.

"What is it?" He grins and cracks a joke. "Were you that worried for me?"

As if I would be done in by these guys. Ignoring Lin snorting in boast Banba looked around the office.

"Good, no one ain't dead."

".....Ha?"

Lin looked blankly at him while keeping the knife pressed to the boss's throat.

Immediately after, Banba saw the boss was bleeding and was startled. "You're hurt! Wait a sec! I'm gonna stop the bleedin'!"

"You're not concerned for me!?"

For some reason Banba was anxious over the boss's well being.

"Hey, what's the meaning of this?"

Banba explained the details when he asked him. “All these guys here got bounties on them.”

“Bounties? How much?”

“All together they’re 3,000,000.”

– 3,000,000

“You serious?” Lin muttered.

“If we bring all these guys alive to an organization called the NPB, we get the rewards. I heard from Enokida-kun, so it ain’t a lie.”

I see, so that’s why Banba was acting like that. He finally comprehended what was going on.

“.....Sorry, I take back what I just said.” Lin grinned up at him. “There will be a bit more harm to you.”

He then quickly punched the man in the face, and he fell unconscious.

Chapter 9

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For a Few Yen More

Chapter 9: For a Few Yen More

With the rush of customers dispersing the western bar Dodge City was more laid-back. It had been one hour since Banba and Lin had sneaked into the Wild Bunch Company. They should be finishing up there soon enough. Enokida informed Banba that the Wild Bunch Company had bounties put out for them. No matter if they were a hit-man group, they were no match for those two. *Right now everyone should be tied up*, Enokida imagined.

Now his next job was waiting for him. Enokida finished relaxing at the end table of the bar and closed his laptop and put it into his bag.

"I'll be going. Thank you for the meal." After he gulped down the rest of his glass he got up from his seat and placed money down onto the table.

"Until the game then." He told Wyatt.

This Sunday they would be having a practice game against his team, the Tokyo Sukiyaki Westerns. "Right, see you then." Wyatt replied with a smile.

Just as he was reaching out to the swinging door, "Hey, Enokida," Wyatt stopped him.

When he turned around Wyatt pointed to the bills on the table.

"If that's for the liquor I don't need it. That's the same amount for the information, right? I'll have it taken from Tora's wages to pay for it."

Telling them of the location of the Wild Bunch Group's hideout in exchange for a free drink was the deal. And as such he had to pay him.

"No."

Enokida shook his head.

"Take it. Otherwise I'd be beating the check."

What do you mean? Wyatt had his head tilted with that expression.

" – Yeah. Also."

Enokida added one more thing.

“Tell those two ‘sorry’ for me.”

Enokida picked up Banba’s luggage and left Dodge City with that final statement.

“ – So this is the Wild Bunch Group’s hideout, huh.”

Tora whispered as he looked up at the building. Ikebukuro 2-Chome 50-Banchi. This address they received from the informant Enokida was at a multi-tenant building on the outskirts of the city. It appeared that the Wild Bunch Group was hiding out in one of the rooms there.

“Listen, alright. Don’t drag your feet.”

“That’s my line.”

Tora and Rabito got into the elevator while glaring at each other. They arrived to the fourth floor. As they got off the elevatorn the door ahead of them opened. Three ill-bred looking men in business suits came out from inside and walked in their direction. They glanced at Tora and Rabito and frowned, “who are you?”

“Are these the guys?” Rabito smirked.

He then quickly made his move.

“Hey, wait.” Rabito ignored Tora trying to stop him and charged at the men with an expression like the predator found his prey. He knocked over one man with a body slam and then punched another man next to him in the face. The men were taken aback by the sudden assault.

“That’s two down.” Rabito stated proudly. “I got a step lead ahead of you.”

– Shit, I was too late.

Tora tutted. They had decided to compete in who could take down as many opponents. He had to catch up.

The third man reached for his pocket. He probably intended to take out his gun, but Tora did not let him. He immediately pulled out his Colt and pulled the trigger while cocking it with the opposite hand. He fanned out his shots. He shot

the man with the handgun, and after he took away his means of attack he closed in and delivered a punch into his solar plexus. That was one down.

“Hey, what’s with all the noise!?”

Another man appeared in the office, having heard the gunshots. After he looked at his fallen comrades and Rabito and Tora the man shouted, “This is your doing?!”

“The great Rabito-sama has come to capture you all!”

Rabito said foolishly next to him in boast.

“Rah-bee-toh?” The man frowned and glared at them. “Which group are you guys from?!”

Group? Tora tilted his head to the side. *What does he mean by ‘group?’*

The man then shouted with a devilish look.

“You know this is the Airan Group’s office, don’t ya?! Right!?”

“.....Eh?”

“.....Ha?”

Tora and Rabito opened their mouths in shock and fell silent.

The Airan Group’s office? What? What’s the meaning of this? This wasn’t the Wild Bunch Group?

“.....Ah, my apologies.”

Tora replied in a small voice. “We were mistaken.”

“Sorry to bother you.”

After they both laughed bitterly they turned on their heel and fled. The next moment the door banged open. Members wearing black clothes rushed inside. And more came in after them. They were hot on Tora and Rabito’s tail.

They would not let them go with a simple, ‘we were mistaken.’ They had suddenly picked a fight with them, pointed guns at them and shot three of their men. However, they had no choice but to run.

“H-hey.” Rabito spoke up as they rushed down the emergency staircase.

“How did it get like this?”

Tora made a call as they ran. The other immediately picked up. “Hello, Wyatt? Hand over the phone to that mushroom-head informant.”

[If you mean Enokida, he already left. He left a tip for his drink.]

“What did you say!?”

[I don’t know why, but he told me to tell you guys he’s sorry.]

“Wha-”

– What ‘sorry?’ That damn mushroom!

Tora cut the call. “Shit.” Tora clicked his tongue. “We were tricked!”

“Ahh? What do you mean we were tricked?”

Why did he give them the Airan Group’s office and not the Wild Bunch Group’s hideout? There was only one reason for it.

“That informant lied!”

With the face of the blond mushroom-haired man came to his mind, Tora scowled resentfully.

“What did you say!?”

They were set up by that man.

“Shit!” Rabito cursed to the heavens next to him. “Informants are all scumbags!”

However, they were not in the time or place to worry about that.

“Stop there, you bastards!”

The heard the voices of the yakuza getting closer behind them. The two sped up even more. They managed to rush down four floors and got outside the building, but then another misfortune awaited them. Other members of the Airan Group just got back. There were a few several ahead of them and several behind them. They were trapped.

“Hey! You guys! Catch those two!”

The yakuza men behind them pointed to them and gave that order. The group

in front of them seemed confused as to what was transpiring, but they did as they were told and went to close Tora and Rabito off.

– We’re completely surrounded.

Tora grimaced. This had gotten out of hand. They were cornered by all the members, surrounded by a group of more than thirty men in black. They were in a life threatening situation.

‘Who were you hired from!?’

“No, we’re-”

“It can’t be you were sent by the Awakusu Group’s Akabayashi, right!!?”

“No, it’s a mis-”

“Seize them and make them talk!”

They were not even granted the opportunity to explain themselves. The yakuza group were now attempting to attack them head on. As things stood right now his competition with Rabito did not matter.

“.....Hey, I have a suggestion.” Amidst the intense atmosphere Tora spoke to Rabito. He gave him a side glance and proposed his idea. “For the moment would you team up with me, Bambino?”

“Okay, Trinity.” Rabito nodded in agreement with a bitter smile. “It’s a cease-fire.”

The next moment the yakuza group all lunged at them. Tora took out his guns and held them up. Just as Tora was about to cock the guns, he suddenly remembered of an event several years ago. Back when he was still in his teens and was the leader of a biker gang, Tora and his group had fought a Saitama team called the Toramaru.

Now thinking about it, I was surrounded by a huge group of people like this and had a huge brawl out. He had fought with fists and weapons in an abandoned warehouse in the city with his comrades.

This brings back memories, he thought to himself. His memories from that time came back to him, and he began to feel exalted. He glanced over to the large man next to him. Rabito was mowing down their enemies one after the

other with his monstrous strength. His expression seemed strangely pleasant as though he was enjoying this situation they were in. This man held a high advantage in an all out fist-to-fist fight.

I can't lose to him, he smirked.

Tora put the guns back into his holster, made a fist and smashed it into the face of the yakuza in front of him with all his might. Settling a huge fist fight like this once in a way may not be all that bad.

– Since I came all this way to Tokyo, I should make a decent amount of money.

Enokida thought up his best measure to easily and effectively earn the most money. The quickest way was to let Lin and Banba capture the wanted men and have them pay a portion of it to him. Fortunately they were already looking for the Wild Bunch Company, so he decided to go with them.

As such, Tora and Rabito who were also targeting the Wild Bunch Company would get in the way. It would be a problem with they butted into them. And just as he was pondering what to do, unsure how to get rid of them, they luckily asked Enokida to help them out – to tell them the location of the Wild Bunch Company. And so Enokida gave them false information.

Although the worst case scenario would be if the Awakusu Group withdrew the bounties. If they did not have any issues where they could go after the Wild Bunch Group themselves, then they would have no use to offer the bounties. For instance, if an opposing organization like the Airan Group got involved that would have been the worst outcome.

So there was Rabito and Tora, and then the Airan Group. To ensure the Awakusu Group kept the bounties up and let Banba and Lin proceed with the job smoothly simultaneously, Enokida decided to take care of the hindrances both at once. He handed over fake information which was the location of the Airan Group's office to Rabito and Tora. This way they would be preoccupied with the Airan Group until Banba and Lin had enough time to finish the job. That way they could secure the bounty with absolute certainty.

After Enokida left the western bar Dodge City, he got a call on his smartphone while walking around the city of Shinjuku. The caller was Banba.

“How is it going?”

[We caught all of them.]

When he asked Banba provided that in answer. He told him that they caught all twenty members of the Wild Bunch Group (although they were nineteen now) and had bound them with rope.

“As expected of you.”

[What should we do next?]

To receive the bounty they had to hand over the people wanted to the NPB, but Banba had no connection to the organization. As circumstances stood at the moment, they could not receive any reward for the bounties. However, Enokida had one. He had Wyatt as an acquaintance.

“I’ll introduce you to a person from the real NPB. And then I’ll return your lost luggage and wallet to you.”

[Eh.....Why do ya know ‘bout my bag?]

“In exchange for that-”

Enokida paid no mind to Banba’s shock and brought up what he really wanted.

“Can you give 50% from the total bounties?”

After he called the number given to him by Enokida, people claiming they were from the NPB arrived in a large car. They seemed to be the bounty hunting organization Enokida talked about. Once they stuffed all the members of the Wild Bunch Group into the paddy wagon, they handed Lin a paper bag. Inside were paper bills. This time they looked to be real.

After they handed over the commissions to the NPB, gave Enokida his share and paid Martinez for assisting them, Lin and Banba were left with about 900,000 yen. Lin felt that 900,000 was not the right price for capturing twenty weaklings, but either way they managed to obtain easy money without a hitch. And on top of that they got their stolen luggage back from Enokida somehow. Now they could spend their time touring Tokyo freely.

The Japanese sword they received from Hugo’s shop was no longer needed.

They could not waltz around the city with such a long protruding weapon on their person, so they handed it over to an NPB worker to dispose of it. The American-like man with a beard happily accepted it, telling them, “I’ll give it to a weapons salesperson I know.”

Now having finished their job, Lin, Banba and Martinez began wandering around the city of Ikebukuro.

“.....Hey, what’s going on over there? Is it a fight?”

Martinez suddenly came to a halt. Ahead of them were a large group of men. There were two young men having a brawl in a crushing situation against an intimidating group of tall men in suits.

“Wait, are those two.....”

The two in question were the cowboy and the priest. He was familiar with them. *Aren’t they those weirdos fighting in the abandoned warehouse?*

“Are they acquaintances of yours?”

Lin shook his head left and right when asked. “No, it’s not quite like that.”

“They seem to be in quite the predicament.”

“.....This city sure seems pretty dangerous.”

He shrugged his shoulders and said that.

“Ikebukuro sure is somethin’.”

Banba lightly smiled. While they did have a few accidents here and there, Banba seemed to be enjoying the trip to the city.

Lin once again turned his focus to the center of the commotion going on. He did not know the reason why those cosplayers were having a fist fight against a large group out in the open, but it was best to not get involved. They just had fought the bounty hunters earlier. He had no intention of getting into more trouble.

So they would not be noticed, they quietly sneaked past them and left the scene. Banba asked as they were walking down an alleyway. “Mar-san, when did ya get to Tokyo?”

"I arrived today. And I guess Enokida is here too."

"Seriously?"

They did not know.

"What the heck....."

Lin slumped his shoulders, crestfallen. *He should have told us that earlier. If we'd known a friend was here, we could have just borrowed money from them. We could have gotten money without going through all that trouble capturing bounties.* He felt they did the roundabout way.

".....Bounty hunting sure is a tiresome job."

"Yeah. It's a tough job."

"I think I'm more suited to be a hitman."

It was easier to kill someone than to catch them, Lin thought wholeheartedly.

They walked further, and just as they were approaching Sunshine 60 Street Banba suggested to them.

"Since we came all the way here, how 'bout we eat somethin'? We can invite Enokida too."

Now that he mentioned it, we still haven't eaten anything.

"Guess we should."

Lin nodded. The game they planned to attend was already in its final session. *We wouldn't be able to make it on time even if we head over to the baseball stadium now, so I guess we can eat out with friends.*

"Oh, that's a good idea. What should we have?" Martinez was also onboard.

"Let's have ramen! Tonkotsu ramen!"

"No way." Lin kicked Banba and pointed to the direction of the Russian Sushi restaurant. "Let's go there to that interesting sushi restaurant."

"Ohh, sushi also sounds good."

"Then after we have sushi, let's have tonkotsu ramen and head back!"

"How about you go ahead and go back to Fukuoka."

Lin went to call Enokida. Fortunately he still had not eaten anything for dinner either. They decided they would meet up at Russian Sushi and would get a table ahead of time. After they walked for a bit and were about to turn a corner, Banba suddenly came to a stop.

“Ah.”

He suddenly raised his voice and pointed ahead of them.

“That person!”

A tall man in bartender clothes was walking down the large street of Ikebukuro. Seeing the man, Lin was taken aback. He looked familiar. *It's that crazy man that went wild and swung the street sign around.*

And then from the opposite side several young thug-like men came by. They laughed in vulgar voices and staggered down the street while chomping on their gum. They were an ill-bred group. The leader-like young man held a cola plastic bottle in his hand. The moment he tried to gulp down the contents as he was walking-

“Oops”

Because he looked away the young man missed passing him and bumped into the man in the bartender clothes. The plastic bottle fell from his palm by the force and rolled onto the ground. The cola spilled out from the opening of the bottle, and a black stain was made on the concrete.

“.....Wait on a sec, mister.”

The young man called out to the bartender who tried to leave wordlessly.

“What are you going to do with my juice? Thanks to you is spilled, but for this. You repaying for it, right?”

A vein popped out on the bartender’s face. “Ah, he’s mad.” Lin thought. It could not have been helped. If someone said to apologize or to compensate something just because they ran into you no matter who that person was they would be mad.

The man in the bartender outfit murmured softly.

“.....Yeah, that’s fine.”

And from there he walked over briskly to the vending machine nearby.

“-!?”

The next moment, Lin was taken aback by the action he took. The bartender man tightly grasped the vending machine and then easily lifted it up.

“Choose what you like from in here.....since I’m repaying you!”

The man’s yell resounded throughout the city of Ikebukuro. And then he turned towards the group and threw the vending machine he was holding. “Gyaaaa,” while they let out pathetic screams the delinquents ran away in fear.

The passerby that happened to be present were also shocked. The previously lively street fell silent. Even so, he could not believe it.

“Wh-what is that man.....!”

– It was already a shock for him to be able to lift up the vending machine, but then he threw it so easily. What a guy. Isn’t he a monster.

Well, I certainly know the feeling. If I was faced with such an arrogant attitude from those conceited kids, I’d be that pissed off too. I wouldn’t want to let them get away free. Even if I was in the bartender’s shoes I would just give a good punch to their faces.

However, I wouldn’t have thought of trying to throw a vending machine, and I wouldn’t be able to. That guys beyond common sense in various ways.

Next to the dumbfounded Lin, Banba’s gaze was shinning. “So neat. That fella, his shoulders are strong too.”

“No, that’s not the issue!”

“That’d be a waste right there if he only does pinch-hittin’.”

He certainly had that well of a throwing arm. That man could easily pull off standing in with a long throw from the nearby home base of Yahuoku! Dome. Not just for hitting, but he would be good for defending the outfield as well but- As he was just thinking that, Lin shook his head. *Not that. What stupid things am I saying? I was corrupted by him too much.*

“This stupid baseball-.....”

Lin exhaled.

"Whoa, that's amazing." Martínez said excitedly next to him. "Couldn't he throw 170 kilometers?"

"Are you also a baseball idiot?"

"He might could, I tell you." Banba chatted with Martínez in interest. "This person makes a fine there swing. He uses his wrists good too, and his bat head speed was fast."

"Though it wasn't a bat, it was a street sign."

No longer listening to Lin's words, Banba and Martínez were getting excited on their own.

"You serious? He has insane outstanding talent. Wouldn't he be good as a two-way player?"

"Right? I'm pitch'n to do some scoutin'!"

"I-idot, wait a sec-"

Shaking off Lin's attempt to stop him, Banba approached the bartender. "That stupid Ban!" Lin held his head, and Martínez next to him frowned, "Will he be alright?"

Ignoring both their concerns, Banba called out to him joyfully.

"Hey, wait a moment."

And then he placed his hand on his shoulder.

".....Ahh?" He seemed to be in a bad mood. The man in the bartender outfit whispered in an intimidating voice and turned his head with the look of a demon. ".....Who the hell are you?"

Facing him like that, Banba started talking without a flinch.

"Ain't you quite somethin' there!"

".....Ha?"

The bartender was taken aback at Banba's sudden praise uncomprehending.

"That last pitch was down right amazing! You got good reflexes!"

“.....Haa, thank you.”

The man in the bartender outfit seemed to have completely lost his malice at Banba friendly smiling at him and his use of Hakata dialect. While making the dubious expression of “who is this guy?” he said his thanks honestly.

“- So, I got a little favor to ask of you.”

And like that Banba entered the main topic right away.

“Won’t you play some baseball with us?”

At the words said with a wide smile, the bartender man titled his head further.

Epilogue エピローグ



ヒロアカニ

Epilogue: Hero Interview

They had finished their practice game between the grass-lot baseball teams the Hakata Tonkotsu Ramens and the Tokyo Sukiyaki Westerns, and that night the Tonkotsu Nine met up at a restaurant in the city in celebration for the game.

"Today is my treat! Drink up whatever you like!" Their coach Genzo toasted with a beer mug in hand. "So cheers!"

"Cheers!"

There was the clinking of beer mugs and exuberant voices. The Tonkotsu Nine each gave praise to every person who made a good effort in their game that day while gulping down their drinks. Enokida, who was sitting across from the second baseman and shortstop Banba and Lin, was also drinking down his beer the same as everyone else.

There were three small bowls laid out on the long table. Banba selfishly wanted to have motsunabe, and so they ordered a nabe dish course for ten people.

"That was a splendid game." Jiro made a fond smile, sitting diagonally across from them. Next to him the elementary schooler he brought with him, Misaki, was drinking her orange juice.

"Nice pitching, Saitou-kun."

"Yeah, you had good pitches right from the beginning and carried through until the end."

"Thank you." Receiving praise from the coach Genzo and the catcher Shigematsu, the pitcher Saitou smiled timidly. "The ninth inning was pretty rough though."

The Ramens managed a sliding victory with 15 to 2. With Martinez's home run, Banba's RBI double, Lin's safe grounder to the infield, and Enokida's safety squeeze, their team had efficiently racked up points. Saitou had made nice

pitching, with only two points taken in the ninth inning. Only in the last inning did they have a base-on-fours, but thanks to their second baseman and short stop they managed to get through safely with their double play.

And this time the Ramens also had a powerful standin.

"Still, that person was quite amazing. It was Heiwajima-san, right?" Yamato said that while recalling the game.

"Really. He made a huge effort, Shizu-chan did." Jiro also nodded absentmindedly.

"If I remember right, Banba brought him, right?" Shigematsu asked.

The third baseman Saeki could not make it because of a sudden job, so the Ramens searched for a standin. And then the person Banba brought was a young man named Shizuo Heiwajima.

"At first he wasn't on board, but I begged him sayin' 'we're short on people, so please,' and he came." Banba boasted.

"What a nice guy. He's scary when he's angry though." Martínez smiled bitterly.

And so the day of the practice game. With it being harsh for a novice baseball player to suddenly play on infield, the right fielder Jiro took up the third baseman position and Shizuo Heiwajima was left to defend the right field.

Number 8 Right Fielder, Shizuo Heiwajima.

"Anyway, I just have to send it flying for away, right?" he had said while gripping the bat, and all nine of the Tonkotsu except Banba felt uneasiness. *Is this person alright.....they thought.*

However, that was also needless fear.

Shizuo Heiwajima had three strikes missing the low thrown ball at his first turn at bat, but since his second turn at bat he gradually managed to perceive the ball. His eyes are probably accustomed to it. On the seventh pitch, he managed to recover the fork ball well and carried it to center field. As the person himself had said, he seemed to have 'gotten the hang of it.'

Just as he said, on the third turn at the bat the batted ball broke through right

and center field and made it to third base on nimble-feet. Continuing onto the fourth and fifth turn at bat, he hit two consecutive home runs out of the premises. The ball flew all the way to the parking lot and hit the front window of an unknown person's car and broke it.

Heiwajima's role as an outfielder does not stop with just offense. During defense, he would make the best of his characteristic throwing arm and saved close call points countless of times. It was almost as if he would tag out a fast runner with a laser beam like Ichiro, or he would ground out the opponent's hit to right field entirely. The pitcher Saitou earnestly bowed his head towards him. The good pitching with two losses on the ninth inning is largely due to the good fielding of the right fielder. There was also a scene with the outfielder Heiwajima as the runner who seemed to overtake the previous runner in an instant.

In any case, Shizuo Heiwajima was an all-rounded player for running, offense, and defense. It was a matter to discuss whether he would be able to aim for the professional world if he seriously made the effort to do so. He was still young, and he would be an immediate good player fresh from society. It was not a long-distant dream for him to be in the major league. However, it seemed the actual individual himself did not have much interest in baseball, but it was truly a waste.

"I wanted to drink with Shizuo-kun too." Banba said keenly.

The huge victory today could not be explained without the outstanding performance of the outfielder Shizuo Heiwajima. If this was a professional game of baseball, without a doubt he would be called to the winner's platform. Banba invited him to the wrap-up party saying, "let's drink together," but he was rejected coolly by him with, "no, I got work."

"Even so," while drinking his potato shochu Shigematsu asked. "Where did you find such talent, Banba?"

"In Ikebukuro."

"Ikebukuro?"

"Yeah. In Ikebukuro Shizuo-kun pulled out a street sign and made a full swing with the thing in his bartender outfit."

At Banba's words, everyone together raised their voice. ".....ha?"

"Yeah, there's no way, right." Yamato laughed with a voice belittling him.
"There's no way that's possible."

"It ain't a lie! Right, Lin-chan?"

Lin nodded with a serious expression having the matter brought up. ".....He's being serious. Unbelievable as it seems."

"He made a wonderful swing. And then later he threw a vending machine barehanded."

"Yeah, no way, no way."

"Yeah, nope."

Enokida and Yamato waved their hands at the same time. There was no way there was a person like that. No matter how amazing a player like him was.

"It's true I tell you!" Without being believed, Banba frowned deeply. And then he asked for an approval from Martínez. "Right, Mar-san?"

"Yeah, I saw it with my own eyes too." Martínez nodded with a serious expression. "Alex Ochoa also has a surprisingly strong throwing arm."

"Who is that man....." Shigematsu muttered that to himself and turned towards their direction. "Enokida, don't you know about him?"

"Who knows." Unfortunately, Ikebukuro was outside his parameters. Enokida tilted his head in thought. "I don't know. Well, rather, I don't think that sort of logic defying human exists."

The other team, however, did not have fixed defensive positions established but instead had multiple players at different defense positions. The left fielder had defended first base before, and their battery mates had switched places another time as well. In this practice game one of their new members was their starting pitcher. Being nearly two meters tall, he had strength put into his straight balls he threw, and at the start of the match the Tonkotsu Nine were fed up with his pitches, unable to hit them.

"Actually about the game," Yamato sitting next to him suddenly remembered.
"The other team's pitcher hit Enokida on purpose."

Today's batting record for Enokida was five turns at bat with one safe hit and four hits made by the pitcher.

"Yeah, that foreigner, right?" Shigematsu who was sitting across from him agreed with Yamato's statement. "He certainly wasn't bad at aiming, but he seemed intent on hitting Enokida."

"Well, it was deserved." Enokida smiled bitterly.

And then,

"By the way, Enokida-chan."

Jiro leaned forward to face him with keen interest.

"What's with that outfit?"

Enokida was in former clothes instead of his usual parka jacket and skinny jeans. He even had a bouquet with him. At Jiro's sudden question everyone turned their attention to Enokida.

"What's with the bouquet? Is it someone's birthday?"

"Is someone retiring?"

"No." Enokida shook his head. "I'm going to see someone after this."

"For you to be so dressed up.....Are you meeting with a girl? Is it a date?"

"No, it's not. I'm just going to congratulate her on her marriage."

At last the nabe dish started to boil. Jiro handed out plates for the main meal that was ready to be eaten.

".....What is this?" Banba took one bite and frowned at the taste. "This is awful.....This ain't motsunabe."

"You were the one who asked for it!" Lin raised his voice as Banba complained next to him. The Tonkotsu Nine spent time enjoying themselves after that. While they ate their nabe dish they each talked about their expeditions in Tokyo.

"It's good once in a while to travel, ain't it?"

Genzo asked with a Japanese sake in one hand.

"Quite." Jiro nodded with a smile. "We were able to go sightseeing too, so it was fun."

"Where did you guys go?" Lin asked Jiro and Misaki.

"Shibuya and Shinjuku. We did a lot of shopping. Right, Misaki?"

"Yeah." Misaki nodded deeply. "We also got to have pancakes."

"Yes, we did. At that one exclusive restaurant in Tokyo."

"That's awesome." Lin got jealous of them upon hearing that.

"I want some too! Pancakes exclusive to just Tokyo! And not just ramen!"

Lin roughly put down his empty beer mug onto the table.

"Hey, listen to this!" He raised his voice and pointed a finger at the man next to him. "He's only ever gone on about having tonkotsu ramen since we got here, so we went to a restaurant in Ikebukuro, right?! And then when we had it he only gave complaints about it. 'The noodles should have been more thin and firm' or 'the soup wasn't dense enough.' And get this, in the end he ended up saying, 'tonkotsu is best in Hakata' anyway. And I told him that's why he shouldn't have had it!"

Lin, now drunk, opened up to all his frustrations towards Banba. Their private room was rather boisterous.

"Hey now, calm down, Lin-chan."

Banba comforted Lin as though it had nothing to do with him.

"Yamato, where did you go?"

Martinez asked him.

"Me?" Yamato replied while pecking at his food. "I went on crowded trains."

"Crowded trains?"

"Tokyo is a great place to hunt."

Yamato worked as a host in Nakasu, but his main occupation was as a pickpocket. In a crowded place like Tokyo, it was a great opportunity to make advancements in work.

"You were working even now?" Martinez smiled bitterly. "You're so stingy."

They passed this fun time and got closer to wrapping up their celebration party. After they finished placing their last order, Jiro looked around the group and asked everyone.

"What is everyone going to do after this?"

"I'd like to go drinking in Ni-Chome." Martinez replied. "Jiro, take me with you. You've been there before, right?"

"That's fine by me." Jiro grinned. "Misaki, would you like to go too?"

Misaki gave him a smile nod while her cheeks were stuffed with ice cream.

"Ehh, you ain't gonna have some ramen when you go back?" Banba pouted.

"You can have some by yourself."

Lin sighed.

Just when Enokida made a bitter smile, his cell phone in his pocket began to vibrate. It was a call from an unknown number. "Sorry, I have to take a call," he said and got up. He exited the private room and moved to a quiet hallway. Once he was away from the ruckus, Enokida pressed the accept call button. ".....Hello?"

[Hey.]

It was a man's voice. He knew who it was immediately – it was that informant.

[Did I catch you in the middle of something?]

"It's no problem." He glanced over to the door to the room and stated, "I was just about to have *motsunabe* with everyone."

[.....nabe (hot pot), huh.]

"Is there something wrong with that?"

[No, I just thought it was past the season.]

"There's no off season for *motsunabe* in Fukuoka."

Enokida left the small talk at that and then brought up the main topic.

"So? How did it go?"

He incidentally obtained the informant of Shinjuku's contact information when he researched on the personal information of Rabito Westwood and Torakichi Nishino. Enokida then offered him a job. To make contact with Miyoko and to summon her somewhere. He wanted to meet up with her and just tell her: the word congratulations with the bouquet of flowers. And the words "thank you" he could not say back then.

[Who knew I would be tasked a job from a genius hacker like yourself. It is an honor.]

"You don't really mean that."

[Haha]

The informant gave a laugh before he gave a report on his results.

[Miyoko-san, was it? I have called her up to meet at a certain place as you requested, and you can do as you like from there. I will send you the address in an e-mail.]

"Got it."

After a beat of a moment, the other began to speak.

[– May I ask you one thing?]

"What is it?"

[Why did you give me a request so out of the blue?]

When Enokida fell silent, the informant laughed.

[I was a bit curious, you see. With the abilities you have, there's no way you wouldn't have been able to look up Miyoko-san's contact information, right? No, not for something so cute as that. If you thought to try, you should've been able to know everything from her associates to her partnerships with men. I can't fathom why despite that you'd spend money and request another informant to do it.]

"There's not much of a big reason behind it."

[.....Could it be, it was to test my skills?]

"There's that too, I guess."

Enokida replied back with vague words.

"Well, I happened to not be free on the occasion. I was busy on another case."

Besides, he continued.

"I don't want to inquire into that person over this and that.Though even if I were say that, you wouldn't understand."

As this man said there was nothing he could not have looked up on his own for certain. Looking up Miyoko's contact information and summoning her somewhere was simple enough.

However, if he looked into Miyoko's affairs, he would have ended up seeing some unnecessary information. There were things better left unknown in this world. There were too many things better off not knowing.

The piano teacher from when he was a middle school student. The beautiful, kind older woman. He did not want to shatter the unchanging image of Miyoko from those times due to unnecessary information. He wanted to keep the existence that served as his one solace from that time beautiful in his heart.

[Huh. I had thought you were more of a dry type, but you're surprisingly a romanticist.]

Enokida grimaced picturing the light smile on the other's face. ".....You're annoying."

Just as he was about to drop the call the man suddenly raised his voice with a, "Ah, that's right," as though recalling something.

[I'll warn you of one thing.]

"Warn me?"

[If you go to Ikebukuro you should be careful around a man wearing a bartender uniform. He is an outrageous man.]

.....Ikebukuro? Bartender uniform?

– I heard that from somewhere before.

Thinking of the possibility he mentioned it.

“Is that person perhaps Shizuo-kun?”

[What's this, you already know about Shizu-chan. Then this makes it fast. If you see him, it would be in your best interest to stay away from him.]

“Eh, we already played baseball together though.”

[.....Ha? Baseball?ha?]

With the other giving a rare unintelligent voice Enokida shook his head saying “ah, no, it's nothing.”

“This Shizuo-kun, he pulls out street signs and throws vending machines?”

[He does.]

The informant replied immediately. From his tone of voice he was able to read out that this was true. Then that meant what Banba and everyone talked about was not a lie. Although he thought it was just a reckless remark it was surprising that such a man existed in this world. It was a shock.

At any rate, they had finished their business with this. The informant departed with a “well then, I will await being of use to you again,” in a joking manner, and then the other dropped the call.

Will I use him again? As he snorted at this there was a short vibration from his computer terminal. Looking at the screen an e-mail arrived from an unknown address. It was probably from the informant. Naturally he was fast at his work. In the text of the e-mail the meet up time and address was listed.

– Miyoko-sensei is waiting at this place?

Unlike himself, he became anxious.

What face will Miyoko make when she sees me now? She would most likely be quite shocked. No wait, would she remember me in the first place?

While feeling a tinge of anxiety Enokida returned to the private room. They were loud as usual. Banba was fairly drunk, and he was just in the middle of complaining about the mentai chazuke they ordered.

“This ain't mentaiko! There ain't no flavor of the raw ingredients! The walleye

pollack is pathetic, I could cry!"

"Then why did you order it, idiot!"

Once Enokida grabbed his luggage and bouquet, he slid past the tipsy Tonkotsu Nine members and quietly left the room. He put the bouquet under his shoulder and fixed his necktie.

"I'm gonna complain to the staff!"

"Stop, you idiot! That'd be embarrassing!"

Enokida left the restaurant while listening to Banba and Lin's lively voices.





Extra Inning

Just how long has it been since they came to Tokyo? The other Ramens members returned to Fukuoka right away, but the second baseman and shortstop – Zenji Banba and Xianming Lin – stayed to enjoy sightseeing around the city.

Or more accurately it was just Lin who had enjoyed himself. Yesterday he spent the whole day window shopping at fashion stores in Shibuya and Harajuku and had Banba tag along as his bag carrier. Banba watched Lin as he got joyous trying on every new one-piece dress with large shopping bags in both hands and an openly annoyed expression. Banba was bored the entire time, regardless of how often Lin made attempts at conversation, asking him: “how does this look?” or “Which do you think look better?” Banba merely replied with nothing more than, “um, don’t that look fine?”

Under Lin’s demand, they ended up extending their stay for another day, and today they planned to eat pancakes at a famous restaurant that was exclusive to Tokyo. Since Lin tagged along to whatever Banba wanted for the past few days, they had nothing but ramen. So this time, Lin could choose what they should have. He wanted to have the pancakes exclusive to Tokyo that Jiro and Misaki talked about so much that he half-forced Banba to Daikanyama.

“Can’t you get pancakes anywhere and they’d be the same?”

Lin turned sullen at Banba’s complaining. “They’re not the same. You can’t get these anywhere else but in Tokyo.”

Naturally with it being a famous restaurant, when they arrived there was already a long line. Seeing the plate hung in the front of the store that read ‘Waiting Time is One Hour,’ Banba was taken aback. “One hour!? We gotta wait that long!?”

Since it was a weekday the line was not as packed as usual. Apparently the waiting time could be up to three hours on a Sunday or holiday. As they got in at the very end of the line, Banba muttered complaints, “Why do we got to get

in line for an hour for just some pancakes?"

An hour later they were finally brought inside. They were seated at a table for two at the window amidst the sickly-sweet fragranced atmosphere.

"Geh." Banba looked around and grimaced. "There ain't no one but women here.....This is so embarrassin'."

Ninety percent of the customers were female. They could see a few couples here and there, but there was no uncouth person like Banba. "I want to go home....." Banba felt like he stuck out like a sore thumb. He uttered nothing but complaints like earlier.

"Ohhh! All of them look delicious!" Lin on the other hand opened the menu and spoke excitingly. "Which one do you want?"

"I don't care."

"I'm conflicted.....Which should I do?A chocolate one or a berry one....."

"You can just get both of 'em. I'll have the other one you want."

"Oh! That's a good idea. Let's do that."

Lin ordered a chocolate flavored one while Banba ordered a mixed berry one. After fifteen minutes a young female shop attendee brought over their order. They were triple-stacked pancakes. The dish was served with nearly overflowing whipped cream with chocolate and maple syrup poured on top. *This looks delicious*, Lin lightly smiled.

He cut a mouth-sized portion with his knife and stabbed it with his fork. When he put it in his mouth his tongue palette burst in flavor. It was exquisite. Lin chewed a few times and gave a broad smile.

"This is amazing!"

It was more than amazing. It was worth the one hour wait to have.

Banba on the other hand had grimaced. ".....Ughk, too sweet."

"Isn't that obvious? They're pancakes." Lin told him as he scarfed down more rapidly.

"As I expected, Tokyo is so nice. It's stylish, and it has a ton of stores."

"Ehhh, you think so?"

"A hick like you wouldn't get it."

Lin then reached over to Banba's plate, "can I have a piece?" The one he got was not bad in flavor either. The balance between the sour berries and the sweet syrup and whipped cream was superb.

Banba had finished eating after just one pancake before pushing his plate to Lin, "you can have the rest."

"You don't want it?"

"Yeah. It's so sweet it unsettles my stomach."

It was not as though Banba disliked sweets, but he did not seem to like a large amount of whipped cream. He called for a waitress and asked for an iced coffee instead. Lin scarfed down both in a matter of minutes. The restaurant was still packed, so without staying longer than they needed to they paid for their meal. Banba treated for today.

"Ahh, that was good! They were the best!"

Lin exclaimed as they left the restaurant. *I'm so glad I came here.*

"I want somethin' salty."

"I'm not having ramen."

When Lin looked at the time, he saw it was past four in the afternoon. Their schedule for the shinkansen was drawing near. They had to get back to Fukuoka soon. It would have been problematic if they got lost again, so the two got in a taxi and headed for Tokyo Station.

The man sitting next to him was unpleasant as ever. He was leaning back in his seat with the seat belt on with a pout on his face, expressing his apparent displeasure.

".....I don't want to go."

"Come on now," Nitta gave him a wry smile.

The man next to him, Shunsuke Saruwatari, was Nitta's classmate in high school. He had belonged to a veteran high school baseball club in the Kanto

region, and at the time they were batterymates. Nitta was the catcher and Saruwatari was the pitcher (and a submarine one at that).

They had teamed up since they graduated, and now the two belonged to the underground world. They worked together as a hitman and killer consultant. Saruwatari was a skilled killer with Nitta as his support, and his name was spreading throughout Kitakyushu.

Although for today, they completely traveled in private.

“.....Do we have to go to our high school reunion?”

Tonight there would be a large class reunion held in Tokyo. Saruwatari was disinterested, but Nitta invited him, made him wear a suit as part of the dresscode, and brought him along forcefully. However, his complaints were ceaseless.

“Come on now, it’s fine to go somewhere every now and then. You’ve never gone before since you graduated, right Sarucchi? You’ll meet all the other members of the baseball team there, so don’t you think it’ll be fun?”

“Not at all. It’ll be a pain in the ass.”

Nitta shrugged his shoulders upon hearing his partner’s curt reply.

“Ahhh, I want to go home.”

Although he expressed that, they were already in the black aircraft Star Flyer at Kitakyushu airport. The cabin crew vanished from the walkways. They would take off in a few minutes. Even if Saruwatari made a fit exclaiming, “I don’t want to go,” there was nothing that could be done about it now.

Saruwatari sighed with a reluctant expression. He loosened his tie, closed his eyes and stated firmly. “I’m gonna sleep a bit. Don’t wake me up.”

“Alright, I got it. Good night.”

Nitta was looking forward to their journey on the way there, but the person he could talk to quickly withdrew himself from doing so. Nitta put in his earphones and reached into his seat pocket. Deciding to indulge himself in an audio program to kill his boredom, operating the screen in front of him while holding an inflight magazine in his other hand.

He heard soft snoring next to him. *A hitman can sleep so soundly in this manner*, he smiled to himself. If he could take it as a sign of trust towards him, then there was a cute aspect to it.

Afterwards, the flight from Kitakyushu to Haneda airport took off smoothly, and they flew into the vast, grand sky.

It was a long six hour ride on the shinkansen from Tokyo Station to Hakata Station. When they had left Tokyo it was still bright out, but when they arrived at Hakata it had already turned dark.

"Ahh, it's been awhile, Fukuoka. It feels great to be home." Banba expressed keenly at the Chikushi exit of JR Hakata Station where there were less passerby at nighttime. Although it had only been a week trip, he talked exaggeratedly as though they just got back to Hakata after a few years.

Lin looked around the area and nodded. "This amount of people is much better."

"Right?"

There was an immense crowd no matter where they went in Tokyo, whether that would have been Shibuya, Ikebukuro and Shinjuku. The sheer number of people there made the center of Fukuoka, Hakata and Tenjin, seem cute in comparison.

"I'm a bit hungry."

"I guess so."

Now thinking about it, they had not eaten anything since they got on the shinkansen.

"Can we have ramen and then head on home? At the old man's place." Banba suggested.

Ramen again? No way. That was what Lin wanted to say, but since he made Banba tag along with him yesterday and today he had to back down. *I guess I'll let him do as he pleases*, he changed his mind.

"Sure, why not. Let's go."

The two got on the Nishitetsu bus from the bus station in front of the train

station and headed to Nakasu. From there they walked past the Haruyoshi bridge. Food stalls lined the street alongside the river. Among them, there was a food stall called Gen-chan that was run by the Ramens' coach Genzo Gouda. That was the spot Lin and Banba decided to go to.

"Welcome."

Genzo greeted them when they pulled back the curtains. Seeing their faces, he gave them a smile. "Oh, it's you guys."

"We're back, old man."

"Did ya get to have your pancakes?"

"Yeah, they were amazing."

"We had to stand in line for an hour!"

The two of them took a seat beside each other. They ordered their usual ramen and asked for two beers.

"Genzo-san, good evening."

Just after they placed their order, a man in white poked his head in from underneath the sign curtains. "Well, look here," he raised his voice when he spotted Lin and Banba. He was Saeki, the Ramens' third baseman. "Welcome back you two."

Saeki had a job to do, so he was unable to go to Tokyo with them.

"We're back, doctor."

Saeki sat down on the other edge of the counter on Lin and Banba's right hand side.

"That's right, we bought souvenirs for you."

Lin exclaimed and took out something from his paper bag. When he handed him over a Tokyo Banana sweet they purchased at the station since he was unable to come to Tokyo, Saeki smiled lightly. "Thank you. You're considerate."

Saeki also ordered ramen and a beer. After a few minutes, their ramen was placed in front of them, and they put their hands together and said, "thank you for the meal."

Another customer came to the food stall just as they got a mouthful of thin and firm Hakata Tonkotsu noodles. This time there was a group of two. It was a young male with silver mushroom hair and a dark skinned foreigner, Enokida and Martinez.

“Oh, you guys are back?”

“Did you get to have the pancakes?”

Martinez and Enokida sat down to Lin and Banba’s left, facing Saeki. With five customers at the food stall, it had gotten crowded and lively in there. Everyone, even Genzo, were part of the toast.

“Ah, that’s right. Here, it’s a souvenir for you.” After they clank their glasses, Enokida had spoken up. He then handed Saeki a Hiyoko cake.

“Enokida-kun,” Banba immediately chimed in. “Hiyoko is a Fukuoka souvenir.”

“No, this is a Tokyo souvenir, right?”

“It’s a Fukuoka souvenir, I tell you!”

Ignoring the two argue over a pointless detail, Saeki asked, “so how was Tokyo?”

“It was fun.” Martinez replied.

It was indeed fun, but not all of it was. “We had a lot of trouble that came up.” Lin grimaced, recalling their traveling days.

“Please tell me about your trip.”

Prompted by Saeki, Lin began to recite everything that happened in Ikebukuro that day. “Banba and I went to Ikebukuro together. And then we got lost.”

“Getting lost at your age is laughable, isn’t it?” Enokida said, making fun of them. “You picking a fight?” Martinez glared at Enokida next to him.

“Still, I’m greatly sorry.”

Nitta addressed the young boy walking ahead of them.

“Getting lost at our age is laughable, isn’t it?”

The boy laughed wryly in response.

Nitta and Saruwatari had safely arrived in Tokyo and got to the class reunion in Ikebukuro, but they quickly ran into an issue when they were heading back. Although, it was all because of Nitta's traveling companion.

The reunion was a buffet party at a reserved banquet hall at a high class hotel, which was spacious enough to hold two hundred people. Nitta and Saruwatari enjoyed the reunion with past friends while drinking for a time. However, one of their former teammates from their baseball club approached them. He apparently became an attorney after graduation and worked for a famous office in Tokyo. He was making his rounds, handing out his business card to his fellow piers. Nitta and Saruwatari took them. His face was proud as he handed over his scraps of paper with his title of attorney on it.

That's amazing. You're an attorney now. Nitta gave the proper responses to easily sidestep the confrontation, but Saruwatari did not let that happen. 'What the hell is with this guy?' He had expressed painly and glared at the man.

The man finished talking about himself and asked them in turn. 'So what are you guys doing now?'

Nitta had the habitual practice like a swindler to mix in a lie with the truth. He gave 'a business consultant' as an answer and added as a clear warning to prevent him from pressing into it more, 'there are strict compliances I have to adhere to, so I can't talk about my job in detail.'

The man then turned his attention to Saruwatari and asked him persistently for what he did now. Saruwatari, unable to lie well, at first dodged the question with 'does it matter?' and 'it has nothing to do with you.' However, the man still kept asking, and Saruwatari could not bear with it anymore. 'Shut the hell up!' He snapped and punched the man in the face. That was to be expected, of course, but it was not even a contest of prowess between a hitman and an attorney. The man collapsed on the floor and withered in pain.

Everyone else in the area turned around, curious of what was going on. The light-hearted atmosphere had turned into an uproar in an instant, and Nitta held his head in shame. Saruwatari huffed proudly and ironically commented, 'I'll put in a word for you when you catch me,' before turning on his heel and walking away.

Angry, Saruwatari walked out onto the streets and into the night. Nitta had to rush after him. ‘Where are you going?’ When he asked, Saruwatari replied with, ‘going back to the hotel.’ They went down a suspicious looking alley, which Saruwatari proclaimed was a shortcut, and arrived at a remote area. There was no hotel-like building in sight.

‘Hey, Sarucchi.....Where are we?’

Saruwatari inclined his head to the side at Nitta’s question.

‘.....I don’t know?’

They were lost.

Nitta could not even sigh. Saruwatari had lost his cool and pressed on, making them get lost. Nitta had long been used to this man lashing out like this, so he was not surprised for this to happen.

More importantly, where were they? They had not gotten that far, so they should still be in Ikebukuro, but unfortunately Nitta did not know this city too well. He pondered whether he should pull out his smartphone and check their current location and the nearby area around them on a map, or if he should flag down a taxi and leave it to the driver to get them back. A boy around high school age was passing by in front of them just then. He must be a resident in this area. Nitta called out to the boy and asked him for directions. The boy was even more kind to them and offered to act as their guide.

Which brought everything to the present.

“You really saved us. For a moment I was unsure of what to do. I’m sorry to trouble you.”

“It’s alright; it’s on my way anyway.” The boy gave him a gentle smile.

“We’re slow on our introductions. I’m Nitta.” Nitta gave him his name as they walked before pointed to the man beside them. “And this person is Saruwatari.”

“I’m Ryuugamine.” The boy bowed his head. He was an unimpressive, earnestly kind person; a normal boy who could be found anywhere. It was the right choice to ask him for directions.

“Come on, introduce yourself.”

“Hmph.”

“Sarucchi!” He sighed. *This man is unbelievable.* “It was because of you that we got lost and had to be helped out by Ryuugamine-san here.”

“I wasn’t that lost.”

“You totally were. How did you end up getting lost even though you lived in Tokyo?”

“I didn’t live in Ikebukuro.”

Watching their bickering, the boy Ryuugamine asked, “where are you two from?”

“Kitakyushu.” Nitta answered him. “We had a class reunion here, and we were on our way back to our hotel.....but a lot happened and before we knew it, we got to this remote area.”

“Kitakyushu is Fukuoka, right?” Ryuugamine asked. “That reminds me, a little while ago I had to act as a guide for two people from Fukuoka as well.”

“Is that so?”

“I’ve been asked for directions a lot recently for some reason.”

“I guess there are more people out like us then.”

Nitta indulged in the casual talk with the boy. However, Saruwatari next to him had muttered, “.....Kitakyushu ain’t Fukuoka.”

“Eh? But Kitakyushu is in Fukuoka, right?”

“Kitakyushu is Kitakyushu.”

“.....Hm?”

Kitakyushu was one of the cities in Fukuoka prefecture. What Ryuugamine said was not incorrect.

“Eh? Um.....”

“Ah, don’t worry about it. He just has a lot of civic pride.”

Nitta told the confused boy with a bitter smile.

"You were lost? That seems to have been quite the dilemma."

"Tokyo Station was way too big." Lin pouted.

Banba nodded in agreement next to him. "There was so many exits, we couldn't understand how to get around. We got so easily lost, I tell you."

"So what did you guys do?" Saeki urged them to continue their story.

"A high school kid named Sakuragamine showed us around."

"It was Ryuugamine." Lin corrected.

"Good thing there was nice people in Tokyo then." Genzo smiled.

A young boy passing by had helped Lin and Banba as they stood in unsure whether they should head right or left at the Ikebukuro Station. If he had not been there, Lin and Banba would have been wandering around the train station forever.

"We managed to get out of Ikebukuro station because of him. However," Lin scowled and pointed to the man next to him. "Then this idiot spotted a batting center. And he suddenly was so adamant about going there."

"After going all the way to Tokyo, you went to a batting center?" Martinez was amazed.

"And so we got in the batting center, and he starting swinging the bat while I went to the restroom. I left my eyes off of him for just a few minutes.' He then gave a glare to the man beside him. "And then our belongings got snatched."

Banba was slurping up his noodles, unconcerned. "Our luggage got stolen. Tokyo sure is a scary place."

Saeki gave them a sympathetic expression. "That sounds like a disaster....."

Enokida on the opposite side of him had snickered. "You went on a trip and the first thing that happens to you is a criminal act. As expected of a hitman duo."

"Their habitual behavior is bad from the start after all." Martinez also laughed.

Because the boy Ryuugamine had served as navigation for them, Nitta and

Saruwatari were able to come back to the lively streets brimming with people. He brought them all the way to Sunshine 60 Street, bringing relief to Nitta when they arrived at a familiar area. From here, Nitta felt they would be able to make it back on their own.

“Seriously, I can’t thank you enough. Thank you, Ryuugamine-san.”

“No, it’s nothing really.” The boy said in reply when Nitta bowed deeply to him before giving him a friendly smile.

“Come on, say your thanks too!”

“Hmph.”

“Sarucchi!”

This man really aggravated him.

“Well then, I’ll be leaving you here.” The boy told them and turned away.

“Yes, thank you for everything.” Nitta bowed once more.

After he watched the boy Ryuugamine disappear into the masses of Ikebukuro, Nitta checked the map of the area on his smartphone. Looking at the screen closely, he saw the nearby buildings highlighted on it with characters labeling them. “That building right there is this one, so the hotel would be over on this side.....”

“Ain’t it this way?” Saruwatari peered at the map and pointed in the other direction.

“Sarucchi, stay quiet for a moment.” Nitta disregarded him and focused entirely on the screen. “We should get there if we head down in this direction, go this way, and then take a right.”

Nitta figured out the way to the business hotel more or less. *Alright, let’s head over there.* He had just closed the map when it happened.

“Ah?”

Saruwatari had suddenly raised his voice. He stumbled a little bit. Just as Nitta wondered what had happened, apparently a stranger had bumped into Saruwatari. “Hey, you’re not gonna even apologize for running into me?”

Saruwatari turned to the other man and called out to him belligerently.

They only had a second to look at him, but he was a young man who wore a baseball hat that covered his eyes. Perhaps he did not hear Saruwatari or maybe he just pretended not to hear him, but the man did not respond to Saruwatari's yell. He immediately immersed himself in the Ikebukuro crowd.

"Hold on right-"

Nitta looked at what the man held in his hands and realized.

"Sarucchi, your bag!"

"Ah?"

"He took it! He snatched your bag!" Nitta exclaimed, pointed at the man.

At some point Saruwatari's bag was missing. That man must have taken it the moment he bumped into him. Saruwatari finally caught up on what had happened. "Ah!" His eyes widened.

"Heeeeey! You bastard, wait up!"

A second later, a voice in a Kitakyushu accent echoed throughout Ikebukuro city.

"And so," Lin, now a bit tipsy, stated with brows furrowed. "Because of Banba we were penniless!"

".....Ehhh, my fault you say?"

Lin was sullen at Banba's whining as he downed his third beer. "Who else was there besides you!?"

"Come on now," Martinez tried to calm Lin down. "You guys just weren't lucky. If you guys would have contacted me, I would have lent you some money."

"I know, right?" Enokida nodded in agreement.

".....We didn't know you guys were in Tokyo at that point."

If they had known a bit sooner, they did not have to go through all the trouble that they did. Recalling their difficulties in Ikebukuro they experienced after that, Lin gave a heavy sigh.

"And how did you two get money?" Saeki leaned forward, pressing for Lin to continue the tale.

"We didn't have any other choice than to work in Ikebukuro."

"You worked as in?"

"We decided to try and do bounty hunter work."

Lin explained what went down in sequence. That he looked up criminals with bounties on them listed on the underground website Undergroundjobs.com Tokyo Version. And that they found a man named Kasaoka among them. They had Enokida look up information on the man. And finally that they infiltrated the abandoned warehouse where he was hiding at and captured him.

"And then some guy came in." Banba chimed in with a beer in one hand.

"Apparently that was someone else who was lookin' for that guy."

Lin said, recalling what happened there. "It was two weird guys, I believe."

"Two people?"

"Were they real bounty hunters?"

"So it seemed." Banba nodded. "It was dark, so I didn't get to see them well, but one looked like some priest. And the other was dressed up like a cowboy."

"What the hell?" Among them, however, only Enokida had raised his voice in response to that description. "Ah." That seemed to have rung a bell for him.

"Hmm? Enokida, you know them?"

"Well, I've heard about them before."

".....I do feel like I've seen them somewhere before." Recalling the two's faces, Lin tilted his head to the side in wonder. He had not thought of it at that time, but now thinking back on it, he really did feel like he saw the two at another place before.

"Wait up, you bastard!"

Nitta also rushed after Saruwatari, who was running at full speed to pursue the thief. After a few minutes, the man wearing the baseball hat tried to get onto a motorcycle parked on the side of the road. It looked like it was his means

of escape. *This isn't good*, Nitta grimaced. They would be at a huge disadvantage if the other got to use his motorcycle. No matter how swift Saruwatari was, they would never catch up to the man.

The moment the man mounted the motorcycle, however –

“I found him. The Ikebukuro snatcher!”

They heard a voice out of nowhere. It was the threatening voice of a young man.

The next moment a black silhouette cut past them. It was a man. The large, black figure stood in front of the thief's path.

Just who is that man? Nitta watched from afar. Saruwatari also came to a stop and braced himself, weary of the sudden appearance of a newcomer.

The man wore a black gown and had a large cross hanging around his neck. He looked like a priest, but his clothes were tattered and he did not look like the normal clergyman.

“Get outta the waaaay!” The snatcher got on the motorcycle and charged at the large priest man.

But the priest did not flinch. He made no indication of moving from his spot. The priest leaned back, dodging the motorcycle charging at him. And the same moment, the priest reached out and grabbed the snatcher by his collar with his large arm. He then easily lifted up the man single-handedly and pulled him off the motorcycle. The motorcycle fell over to its side and slid against the ground in the alleyway until it collided with the opposite wall.

The priest then tossed the man he had a hold on with a monstrous strength they did not expect him to have and bashed him against the ground. “Gyah,” the snatcher cried out in pain. He stumbled as he attempted to stand before turning away and running off into the opposite direction, turning his back away from the priest.

Ah, he's getting away.

Just as they thought that.

“.....From a luggage thief to a bag snatcher? This is a wild city as always.”

There was another man's voice.

A different man stood in front of the snatcher, blocking his path. This time, it was a man dressed as a cowboy. He wore a large hat with flanges around it, a western shirt and boots. Nitta was wide eyed, watching the man who looked like someone who had traveled through time from the western pioneering area.

.....*Now who is it?*

The cowboy sprinted at the man trying to run away. As soon as he got in close quarters with the man, he then gave a strong punch into the other's solar plexus without restraint. The man held a hand to his chest and fell to his knees.

During that time, Saruwatari had crept up on the snatcher. "You bastard. Whose bag did you think you just took?!"

He yelled and punched the man with everything he had in his face.

"You bastard! I'll kill you!"

He gave him another punch followed by another. He began throwing punches, alternating between both hands.

"Hey, not the face." The cowboy saw that and told him with a frown. "Please hit his body."

"Hey," Nitta heard a voice coming from behind him. The priest from earlier stood there. He held Saruwatari's bag in his hand. "This is your bag?"

"Yes, it is." Nitta answered in place of Saruwatari as he was busying himself with punching the man. He took the bag from him and gave him his thanks. "I'm sorry for the trouble. Thank you."

Nitta turned to Saruwatari after he punched the snatcher a final time and handed over his bag, "isn't this great? Sarucchi. We got your bag back."

However, Saruwatari merely snorted in return, "umph."

The thief remained laying down on his side, motionless; perhaps he lost consciousness due to Saruwatari's punches. The cowboy grabbed him by the arm and started to drag him away.

At that moment –

"Hey."

The priest called out to the cowboy in a low voice.

"Hey there, where do you plan on going? Mister indigent?"

He said in an overly familiar provocative manner. Apparently the two knew each other.

"You're pretty damn cheeky; do you think you can just take my prey?" The priest approached the other man as he said that.

"This is my prey." The cowboy man replied calmly. "I can do whatever I like with him."

"Haa? I was the one who found him first!" The priest grabbed the thief by his left arm and attempted to pull him out of the other man's grasp. "Let him go!"

"Ha!" The cowboy laughed.

"Listen here, you gorilla rabbit. I'll gladly inform you on one thing: the bounty hunting industry doesn't work like a game of hide-and-seek. It's not about who can find the target; it's our job to capture them."

He pulled harder instead of letting go.

"As. Such! Even though I caught him! You're! Trying to take him from me!"

Being harshly pulled by the two men on both sides, the thief woke up and yelled in pain. "Ow-ow-ow-ow!" He must have felt like he would split in two.

"I'll inform you of another fact." The cowboy stated without lessening his grip. "In the bounty hunting industry, whoever is the fastest wins. You're at fault for being too slow."

"Ha!" This time it was the priest who laughed.

"Snatching someone else's prize is a natural trait for someone who was in a gang before like you. You're upbringing is very apparent."

".....What did you say?"

The cowboy's complexion suddenly changed. He glared at the priest with a sharp gaze. "You bastard. Did you just make fun of the mother who raised me?"

There was an heavy atmosphere between the two.

"I'm not making fun of anything." The priest glared back undauntedly. "I mean a mother who'd name their son Torakichi is stupid enough already."

"I'll kill you!"

"Try then!"

"I see." Martinez was the one to speak as the first person to finish his ramen. "So you ended up butting heads against the other bounty hunters in an unfortunate turn of events. You guys are sure unlucky wherever you go."

It was truly unfortunate they targeted the same prey, but their opponents were nothing against them.

"But the fella was no match for Lin-chan." Banba smiled, prompting Lin to snort proudly, "damn straight."

Lin held a one-sided battle against the cowboy man, and although he was strong for an amateur he was no match for someone like him who was trained to be a killer since he was a child.

"Even so, two bounty hunters dressed like a priest and a cowboy sure sounds rather amusing."

"Ain't it?" Banba nodded at Martinez's words.

"I think a killer who wears a Niwaka mask is more than amusing in itself."

Lin agreed at Enokida's comment. There were a ton of strange people in the underbelly of Japan. There was that hitman-ninja who threw shuriken for instance.

"And that cowboy and priest guy really did not get along."

As soon as the two saw each other, they foul-mouthed each other and started a brawl. They did not take any notice for Lin, Banba or the wanted man there. Because of that, they were able to secure the bounty without any trouble.

"So," Saeki returned to the main topic. "You caught the wanted man and got the reward for it, right?"

Lin shook his head left to right. "Well, no."

“Eh?”

There was another complication that occurred in their tale.

“We went and handed over the wanted man, but the guys didn’t give us the money.”

“The reward was all fake.”

“Whoa, seriously?” Martinez laughed. “The disaster continued.”

“It really did.”

“So what did you two do?”

“Naturally, we went to their hideout to get them to pay up.” They were tricked and made to work for free. They were not just going to let that go. Lin pointed to the informant sitting in front of him. “We had this guy look up their hideout for us.”

Enokida was then the one to continue to details of the story. “That group was a company for hitmen for hire called the Wild Bunch Company. These guys essentially would do anything for pay. Their office was in Ikebukuro, and they had about twenty people.”

“And all of them got bounties put on their heads.”

“So you two caught all of them and received the reward for them, right?”

“You captured twenty people? Just the two of you?” Saeki was amazed.
“That’s incredible.”

“We got help from Mar-san too.”

“Well, only a little.”

“Anyway, a lot of shenanigans happened. I’m fed up with the bounty hunting business.”

“Right?”

Banba made a wry smile as he downed his beer. “But thanks to that, we got to meet Shizuo-kun.” He stated after he ordered another beer with a pleased smile.

“Shizuo-kun?”

Saeki tilted his head upon hearing his name for the first time.

“Who is that?”

“He was our standin this time ‘round.”

Since Saeki could not go on the trip because of work, he did not know of Shizuo Heiwajima. “We got someone to take your place, but he was outstandin’ I tell you!” Banba supplemented.

“He was a good runner, batter, and fielder; an all rounder.”

“He made such a big impact.” The young male with the blond hair who wore a bartender outfit and sunglasses had a batting score of three strikes, a hit towards centerfield, a hit to third base, and two home runs. He put in such an effort as a standin there was no room for criticism.

“Who was that guy in the end?”

“He was quite the character.”

“Wasn’t he a bartender?”

“No, he was a debt collector, right?”

“But he was wearing bartender clothes?”

Everyone there cocked their heads in confusion.

“.....Who are these guys?”

Nitta tilted his head as he watched the bustling corner from a distance.

“Hell if I know,” Saruwatari replied back next to him. They got his belongings back, so he did not have any other particular interest in anything.

“Sarucchi, you aren’t interested at all?”

“Not really.”

“Why do you think these two are wearing such odd outfits?”

The two people who suddenly showed up – the priest and the cowboy – immediately began fighting as soon as they saw each other. It then developed into a fist fight with the two of them exchanging blows in front of them even

now.

"Ha! That won't work!" The priest spat out spit mixed with blood and yelled that at the other man. Although he just got punched in the face, he was still going strong.

"Don't act tough! You're shaking!"

"Where do you see that? You sure you aren't blind?!"

The priest was the next to throw the punch. He raised his thick arm and sunk his fist into the cowboy's right cheek. He then faced this opponent as he staggered back a few steps and yelled. "Be grateful! I'll make your grave with the money from this guy's bounty!"

"Try and kill me, you little shit!" The cowboy blocked the attack as he tutted.

This guy's bounty?

Nitta had a realization at the priest's proclamation. That meant this bag snatcher had a bounty placed on his head. Then these oddballs must be bounty hunters targeting the reward for the bounty.

Nitta watched the two's brawl for a while. And then he saw a silhouette move from behind them. The thief that was collapsed near the two earlier was now sluggishly getting to his feet.

Before he could voice it, it was already too late.

"Ah, he got away."

The thief stealthily ran away from the scene without them noticing him. But the priest and the cowboy were so entirely focused on their fight, that they did not seem to care about him.

"Hey! That guy got away!"

Nitta called out to the two men.

".....Wha?"

The priest and the cowboy both turned to face him simultaneously.

"Look, over there."

When Nitta pointed over to the thief, the two men were taken aback.

“Ah, you bastard!”

“Shit, when did he-!”

But isn't it your guys' fault for starting a fight so carelessly? Nitta frowned.

“Hold up, dammit!”

“I won't let you escape!”

The priest and cowboy then dashed off in hot pursuit after the bounty. And the thief with the bounty was desperately trying to run away.

“Someone, catch him! He's a thief!” The priest shouted to the passerby as he ran down the large street.

Just then, two men appeared from the other side of the street. One was a man with dreadlock hair and glasses, and the other man was a blond who wore bartender clothes. They both looked like hoodlums from somewhere. They were walking with a can of coffee in one hand in their direction.

The thief was rushing towards them with no intention of stopping.

“Hey, sir! Catch that guy! He's a thief!”

The two gangster-looking men took notice of the priest yelling at them for help. At that moment, the man's lips moved a little – the one wearing the bartender clothes. Nitta was not accustomed to reading lips, but it looked like the man had muttered, “.....a thief, you say?”

“That person sounds amazing.” Saeki said with wide eyes. “Is he someone experienced in playing baseball?”

They had all finished their ramen, but no one stood up from their seats. Each Ramens member was getting more excited to talk about the young man they had met in Ikebukuro as they downed more cups of sake.

“I think he should aim to become a pro. He's still young after all.”

“Yeah, he has incredible talent for him to become a professional player. He'd probably become a regular in his first year. He'd be the rookie of the year and the winner of the triple crown at the same time, right?”

"He's strong too, so you'd make a good ambidextrous pitcher."

"He's get the Sawamura Award, wouldn't he?"

"He's fast on his feet, so he'd be the king of stealing bases."

"He's good at defense and wouldn't be short on getting a Golden Globe either."

"He'd probably be able to get awards in twelve fields."

"Hey, you serious? Like an academy award?"

"That Shizuo-san sure sounds like an incredible person." Saeki exclaimed. "I would have loved to meet him."

"That ain't the only thing," Banba spoke as though he was proud of his own relative. "Shizuo-kun has incredible physical strength. He pulled a street sign out of the ground barehanded and made a full swing with it."

Saeki's eyes widened at the intriguing comment Banba made. "Eh? What?"

"It's really hard to believe."

"I saw it actually happen too," Martinez told him. "He isn't human. That guy's a monster. You don't want to make an enemy of him."

No kidding, Lin nodded in agreement. "Anyone that would pick a fight with him is a complete idiot."

What happened next took Nitta by surprise.

The man in the bartender outfit crushed the can of coffee in his hand, and after he made it into the shape of a softball he threw it at the thief. He did so with the motion of an outfielder pitching a ball to the catcher to get a runner out at home plate.

"Ah-gah."

The instant ball smashed into the thief's stomach. It was a strike; the man had great aim too.

The steel can bounced off the man's body and dropped to the ground, rolling all the way to Nitta and Saruwatari's feet. The thief passed out from the pain and was captured by the priest and cowboy man. The two continued their

bickering as always, but they seemed to have agreed to cooperate with each other for the time being. The two then began to carry the man off.

"Hey, did you see that just now?"

Saruwatari spoke, pointing to the man in the bartender outfit with his chin.

"He looks strong."

Nitta had a bad feeling wash over him upon seeing the glint in his partner's eyes. Saruwatari looked over the bartender top to bottom before walking forward, picking up the crushed canned coffee that fell on the ground.

"Eh.....Wait, Sarucchi, what are you doing-.....?"

"I'm going to pick a fight with him."

Saruwatari squeezed the steel ball tightly and grinned. He turned to face the other man, glared his target down with a sharp gaze and raised his left leg high into the air. He then shifted his weight onto his right side as he leaned over. His arm flung over the ground as he released the ball – it was an underthrow pitch.

The metal object Saruwatari threw was directly heading towards the bartender. The man moved, having noticed Saruwatari. But shockingly enough, the man then pulled out a street lamp nearby, gripped it with both hands and took up a stance to hit Saruwatari's pitch. He gauged the timing of the flying ball coming at him and made a strong swing with the street light as he took a step forward. But the ball sunk down a little in front of the man – a sinker. It was Saruwatari's unique curveball.

They thought he would have missed.

However, the bartender managed to narrowly hit the ball. "Oryaaaa!" Just as the ball's trajectory changed, the man gave a grin yell and made a full swing with the street light. There was a metallic sound and a gust of wind around the area at the same moment. The light part of the street lamp had hit the steel can, hitting the ball dead on.

The ball flung far away and vanished into the night sky of Ikebukuro.

The distance was grand. The hit was a outfield homerun.

Saruwatari was stunned and stood there dumbfounded. He seemed to be

shocked that the man had hit his specialty pitch instead of the man pulling a street lamp out of the ground barehanded and swinging it.

After a few moments –

“.....That guy only saw my sinker one time and hit it.” Saruwatari smirked.
“.....He’s good.”

Nitta was also surprised that the man did not miss Saruwatari’s curveball. “Is he someone experienced in playing baseball?” Nitta had cocked his head in wonder, but Saruwatari ignored him and approached the bartender a step at a time.

“.....Who the hell are you?” The bartender scowled at Saruwatari as he came into his view. He was clearly upset. “It’s dangerous to suddenly throw that at someone.”

Wait, but you threw that earlier too, Nitta had wanted to say, but he remained shut. He did not want to get involved with this dangerous group.

Saruwatari faced the man and stated.

“I’m someone called Shunsuke Saruwatari.” His greeting was said with a mix of killing intent. “And who are you?”

“.....Shizuo Heiwajima.” The other man replied, displeased.

For Saruwatari to give his name meant he acknowledged the other person. Nitta could easily imagine what would happen from here on out, but he did not have the confidence that he could stop Saruwatari now. The two glared at each other and exchanged words.

“Who knew there were guys like you still in Tokyo.” Saruwatari took off his suit jacket and tossed it aside and loosened his tie before holding up both of his hands in front of his chest, preparing for a fight. “I’ve wanted to hunt guys like you down.”

“I got no idea what you’re on about.” Shizuo Heiwajima’s brow furrowed even more deeply. “But if you’re asking for a fight, you can have it.”

“I am. It’ll cost ya, so prepare yourself.”

The two men moved at the same time. Shizuo Heiwajima swung the street

lamp once again. Saruwatari went to close the distance, dodging the swing by slipping past him.

When the fight began compulsively, Nitta braced his head.

“.....Ahhh.”

Of course it was going to end up like this.

Saruwatari always had a belligerent personality and desire for blood where he could not be satisfied until he got to fight a strong opponent. Nitta thought it would be better if he could grow up a bit more though.

Every time the bartender swung the street lamp and every time Saruwatari dodged it, damages were inflicted upon the public property in Ikebukuro from the walls and telephone poles to the concrete ground. It looked like the city would be destroyed before this match would be settled at this rate. The police would probably hear the commotion and rush over here. Nitta just hoped his business partner would not be arrested. Cleaning up the mess afterwards was his job as a consultant after all. Nitta was overcome with a sense of uneasiness and sighed.

Just then, there was someone else near him that sighed in the same manner. The man with the dreadlocks had shrugged his shoulders in exasperation. He then called out to the bartender who was swinging the street lamp around.

“Heey! I’m going to go eat ahead of you!”

The bartender did not seem like he would be having dinner anytime soon. “I’ll wrap this up quickly,” the man replied back as he focused on finishing his opponent in front of him.

The man with the dreadlocks turned on his heel. At that moment Nitta exchanged a glance with him.

“Sorry for my idiot.”

Nitta gave him a wry smile and bowed.

“No, don’t worry about it.” The man with the dreadlocks gave him a friendly smile back. He had a kind demeanor that Nitta had trouble imagining him to be a hoodlum type.

"Both sure are troublesome, aren't they?"

"Yeah, you're telling me."

They both laughed at that, "ahaha." Nitta felt like he could relate to this person.

"More importantly, would he be alright?" The man with dreadlocks asked him. He pointed to Shizuo Heiwajima and warned him. "That guy is pretty strong, so your friend may be in some trouble."

"Oh yeah, he'll be fine." Nitta nodded. "He was the one who initiated the fight. Besides, he's overjoyed that his opponent is strong."

Glad to hear it then, the man smiled.

Immediately following that –

"Ah." He raised his voice as though he just recalled something. "If you don't mind, would you like to go have sushi with me? That restaurant over there is really good."

When he told him that, he pointed to the sign that said 'Russian Sushi' on it.

"Sushi! That sounds great." Since Saruwatari stormed out of the banquet party, Nitta did not have a full meal. He was starving. "But is it alright if we go together?"

The dreadlock haired man looked over to the two fighting in the distance and shrugged. "We can just wait for them as we eat."

"I guess we could." Nitta smiled bitterly before consenting. "Alright, by all means then."

"I'm Tanaka."

The dreadlock man introduced himself as they walked together.

"I am called Nitta. Nice to meet you."

They exchanged greetings and shook hands.

"By the way," Nitta asked the man walking next to him. "That person who is with you can really make a nice swing. Is he someone experienced in playing baseball?"

Although a bit tipsy, they had fun chatting with their friends, and it was almost the next day by the time they left Genzo's shop. Lin and Banba got into a taxi and headed to the Hakata area.

They returned to Banba's office that was also their home, located at an apartment complex a little ways down from the Hakata Station Chikushi Exit.

“We're home.”

Lin and Banba said simultaneously as they entered inside. There was no reply since they were the only residents though.

“We're finally back.”

Banba laid down on the sofa as he said that keenly.

“The trip was fun, but home is definitely the best.”

“What's with that cliche comment?”

Even though you were so hyped up in Tokyo, Lin was exasperated.

“Ah, I wonder how baseball went.” Banba said and turned on the TV. He searched for the sports news channel as it started up.

Banba wavered between joy and sorrow as he watched the Hawk's match in their slightly dirty office. It was the usual, familiar scene.

Yeah, we're back. Lin thought.

A few years ago, he never thought that he would have a place he could come back to.

‘Home is definitely the best.’ Lin thought over Banba's words and thought to himself, “that may certainly be the case.”

The sports news had finished, and the program changed to national news. The footage with the caption ‘A Scuffle in Ikebukuro’ shown on the screen. It was a report on the events that happened in Ikebukuro.

“Ah.”

Banba suddenly raised his voice.

“Ain't that Shizuo-kun?”

The viewer program played the clip. On the screen displayed a familiar blond man wearing a bartender outfit. It was Shizuo Heiwajima.

Shizuo Heiwajima was running wild in the city of Ikebukuro. The footage of him throwing trash cans and swinging street lamps was shown on the national TV network.

"He's going nuts again."

Lin sighed. At that moment, there was a black silhouette that ran across the screen. When he looked closer, it was a young man who wore a suit and had gray hair. He would throw his own objects at the other or kick at him as he dodged Shizuo Heiwajima's barrage of attacks.

Lin had seen that face before.

".....Ah!"

Lin and Banba muttered at the same time.

"Hey.....Isn't he?"

".....Yeah, I reckon' it is."

There was no mistake; it was that man.

But why is that guy in Ikebukuro?

Lin tilted his head to the side in wonder, but Banba turned off the TV. ".....I'm tired. How 'bout we go to bed?"

".....Yeah, I guess so."

Lin had no idea why that man was in Tokyo instead of Kitakyushu and why he picked a fight with Shizuo Heiwajima in Ikebukuro, but he did not want to invest himself more into it. Lin and Banba decided to leave it as though they never saw it and went to their appointed sleeping arrangements.

GAME SET

Translation Notes:

1. [Daikanyama](#) is a shopping area in the Shibuya Ward in Tokyo.
2. [Tokyo Banana](#) (東京ばな奈) is a cream-filled cake and a standard souvenir treat.
3. [Hiyoko](#) is a treat that was made Chikuho Iizuka, which later migrated to Tokyo and Fukuoka, so that's why Banba and Enokida are confused of its origins.
4. So Kitakyushu is a city name and it literally means “northern Kyushu,” as the city is located at the northern most part of Kyushu. And as mentioned, Kitakyushu is in the Fukuoka prefecture, but Fukuoka City itself is farther south.

Afterword

This story, which was serialized as part of the Dengeki Bunko Resurrection Series in Dengeki Bunko Magazine, has been published into a light novel form. Dengeki Bunko Resurrection Series is a project to celebrate Dengeki Bunko Magazine breaking through its 50th edition. The concept was something like, “have Dengeki Bunko writers write new stories to revive the worlds of popular Dengeki Bunko works.” So I took the lead with the first step, bringing the collaboration of the awe-inspiring Ryohgo Narita’s Durarara!! series and my own work Hakata Tonkotsu Ramens. I considered calling the title for the novel “Hakata Tonkotsu Durararamens,” but at some point the main editor made the decision on it, and now it is this. I was worried if fans of Narita-sensei would not like it (I wasn’t the one who decided it!), so please give me some leeway.....!

Everything started last winter. I was told by my editor out of the blue, “you’re going to do a collab with Dura~,” and I was greatly taken back at the grandeur of it. They told me, “it’s a project for a celebration event, so take it easy and have fun,” but there was no way I could take this easy. I mean, it was a collab with a great work. I didn’t think I could do it. I was shaking from the internal pressure and the awe-struck feeling and the anxiety, but an unbelievable opportunity was bestowed onto me, so I mustered everything I had and tackled the project. I’m a negative chicken, so I’m still shaken up by it. But there is a part of me that greatly enjoyed doing it, so I’m awfully grateful.

The truth is (there may be those that already know), the editorial department had the same connection as I do, as Narita-sensei wrote me a recommendation for my debut. And now I was allowed to do a collaboration with him, and furthermore! Sensei helped me out the whole time, checking the script during a busy time for him. I am deeply grateful for allowing me to take this position. Narita-sensei, thank you very much!

And many others have helped out this time as well. To Wada-sama and Endou-sama in the editorial department, I greatly apologize for having you deal with any issues I cause due to my negative and chicken self..... I don’t think I can change my personality, but I will try my best, so I look forward to continue

working with you.

And to Hako Ichiro-sensei, who provides illustrations in the serialization of Hakata Tonkotsu Ramens in Media Works, we were able to compete in this collab project as well. There is no illustration for Media Works, but as a fan of your work, I'm pleased to see more of your illustrations.

And thanks to everyone in putting in their time and effort into serializing this work, we have been able to offer it to the world. I would like to thank every single person that helped out in publication. And many thanks to friend S and Y for always cheering me up as I got drunk and cried, "I'm no good....." with a beer in hand at a restaurant.

Lastly, to the readers who picked up this story. For taking up your valuable time to read this, thank you very much.

It seems the Dengeki Resurrection Series project will serialize other works as well. There will be jostling collaborations with popular series done by other Dengeki authors, so please check out the other series!

And now, I pray that we will meet again somewhere!

Chiaki Kisaki

I'm Hako Ichiro who was in charge of providing the illustrations. It was a huge surprise for me that I was chosen to draw the Durarara!! characters for this novel.

The Durarara!! series was a work I held respect for that I never had the chance to draw, so being able to illustrate the characters illustrated by the cool Yasuda-sensei is.....well, I shook from the awe of it in apprehension. That said, it is rare to be able to have this wonderful experience. I put my heart and soul into it to the best of my ability, so I hope I was able to add a little bit with my illustrations as you proceeded through the story.

Although I only hold the position as illustrator, I also give my thanks to Narita-sensei for looking this collab over at such a busy time for him. Thank you very much.

And to the author of Hakata Tonkotsu Ramens, Chiaki Kisaki-sensei. She has

always provided me with wonderful commentary for my illustrations and has become one of my motivators. I hope to continue illustrating while enjoying your work as a fan.

Lastly, thank you for allowing me to have this precious experience again!

Hako Ichiro

Hakata is the best! Even though I've never been there before!

Ahh, please don't throw rocks at me!

So, the man who abruptly appeared, spouting outlandish comments is- Well, you can probably guess it. Nice to meet you, Hakata Tonkotsu Ramens fans. I'm the author of Durarara!!, Ryohgo Narita. And thank you for picking up this collab story!

The Durarara!! Characters are used as ingredients in this rich ensemble of a drama like Kisaki-san's tonkotsu ramen, and then even the ●● Shizuo got to show a new side to him. I'm endlessly moved for it!

I think for many Hakata Tonkotsu Ramens fans this will be the first time you've encountered Durarara!!, but if you had developed any interest in the man who throws vending machines, the mysterious Headless Rider, or the informant in Ikebukuro, then I hope you also can enjoy the Durarara!! Series!

Likewise, for all the Durarara!! Fans, I think while characters like Mikado and Shizuo remain true to themselves you could also have a different taste of the city's atmosphere surrounding them.

The Hakata Tonkotsu Ramens series has a more bloodthirsty air to it than Durarara!!, but even in the Ikebukuro I write in Durarara!! It is a darker Ikebukuro with figures like a courier and underground doctor strutting around. Kisaki-san just writes an "even darker place."

Naturally the real Ikebukuro and Hakata cities have a better public order than the world of Durarara!! And Hakata Tonkotsu Ramens series that we write, and there is no hitman organization or people who could throw vending machines.Probably.Probably?

Now then, for writing a spectacular work, I suppose I have to return the favor.

And so, I will write Durarara x Hakata Tonkotsu Ramens 2 (a tentative title), in which each of the Durarara!! Characters go to Hakata! And previously I talked with my editor and I decided to do it as I was writing the afterword for the Durarara!! spin-off series novel “A Standing Ovation with Izaya Orihara.”

.....But I have yet to receive permission from Kisaki-san. My editor told me, “let’s surprise them with the afterword,” but it would be a huge embarrassment for me if Kisaki-san were to tell me, “no,” after writing that in there..... Well, she’ll tell me then!

Speaking of which, I wrote a little collab scene after the afterword in the “obscure story” in “A Standing Ovation with Izaya Orihara.” Kisaki-san already knew about it ahead of time, so she looked over the Hakata dialect used in it. Kisaki-san, thank you very much.....!

At any rate, how did you think of this collab? I had a blast. I hope everyone was able to experience something new from the mix of your favorite works!

Starting with Kisaki-san, Bapio-san and the illustrator Hako Ichiro-san to everyone who helped make this and everyone who picked up this novel – thank you very much!

(While considering going out to have tonkotsu ramen after finishing this afterword),

Ryohgo Narita.